



The Nation's Health Podcast transcript: FY26 Budget Breakdown: Health on the Line

June 2025 episode

MEADOR: *Big cuts and big consequences; that's what public health experts are warning as President Trump's proposed federal budget moves through Congress. With major reductions on the table, the future of the nation's public health infrastructure could be at serious risk.*

From the American Public Health Association. I'm Sophia Meador, and this is The Nation's Health Podcast. Joining me as co-host for this episode is The Nation's Health's Arushi Dogra.

DOGRA: Thanks for having me.

You've been reporting on President Trump's actions and their implications for public health since he took office in January. From what you've told me, his budget proposal for the fiscal year of 2026 includes some major changes that could have serious implications for public health.

MEADOR: Yeah. That's correct.

DOGRA: Before we get into the nitty gritty, can you walk me through how the budget process works? I think that can be confusing for a lot of people.

MEADOR: Yeah, for sure. So, in a typical budget cycle, the presidential administration will submit a proposal to Congress early in the calendar year based on its priorities.

In the months that follow, Congress is expected to pass a resolution that lays out spending and deficit limits and it acts as a sort of blueprint for what the budget will eventually look like. Then the House and Senate appropriations leaders will split into 12 committees that oversee different sectors — so things like transportation, defense or health — and each committee negotiates how much is going to be spent on what in the budget.

The negotiations have to pass by Sept. 30 for the start of the new fiscal year on Oct. 1 to avoid a government shutdown. Once both chambers of Congress agree on a single budget bill, it goes to the president's desk for approval.

But unfortunately, as we've seen a lot in recent years, things don't always go according to plan, especially as far as timing goes. Congress actually never passed a fiscal year budget for 2024 and 2025. But that's a rough schedule of how the budget process is supposed to go.

DOGRA: That makes sense. So as of right now, in late June of this year, where are we in that process?

Yeah. So right now, Congress is in the appropriations process. So the committees are in the negotiating phase.

DOGRA: And what does funding for the Department of Health and Human Services look like under the president's proposal?

HHS funding would be significantly cut. And specifically talking about the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the president has proposed cutting about half of the agency's budget.

DOGRA: Do you have any details on how much of the CDC budget goes out of the door to state and local health departments?

MEADOR: Yeah. So under operations as they are right now, CDC sends about 80% of its funding to state and local health departments, so they would be dramatically affected. But it's not just CDC that would be impacted.

If passed as proposed, the budget would dramatically reduce federal public health operations as we know them. Work on everything from air pollution to job safety — infectious disease, would all be affected. My sources tell me cuts to Medicaid alone could cause as many as 10 million people to lose coverage and all this is coming on top of cuts to staffing, infrastructure funding and programs already made this year by the Trump administration.

Public health leaders I've spoken to also tell me they're worried the budget would hurt their programs and capabilities of local and state public health departments across the nation.

DOGRA: Joining us today is Damon Chaplin, Commissioner of the Minneapolis Health Department and board president of the National Association of County and City Health Officials. The Nation's Health spoke to him about what additional federal budget cuts could mean for his department and for public health nationwide.

MEADOR: Thanks for joining us, Damon. With possible cuts to public health, what's your biggest concern right now, personally?

CHAPLIN: Staff morale and retention. I think one of the things that we're seeing is that folks are very concerned about their ability to stay in their job — keep their job and their employment down the road.

So the looming impacts from federal cuts are making folks are, you know, really nervous and concerned about their employment long term. And so keeping those folks engaged and keeping them hopeful about what will happen and strategies going forward has been, you know, one concern for me right now.

MEADOR: And how are these proposed cuts different from past reductions?

CHAPLIN: In the past, we've received cuts from CDC, but they've been more around grants and that as a program, as a health department, you might not have received a grant or renewal for a grant in a specific area. But these are cross cutting — cuts across whole divisions. And so, we're looking at potentially whole functions within health departments not being able to do what they were designed to do because of these cuts.

And so, that's the difference in the way that these cuts are having in the way that they've happened in the past.

MEADOR: And have you already seen impacts from canceled grants?

CHAPLIN: Yeah. We've lost staff that we were able to bring back a temporary in a temporary position. And we've lost some contracts that we've had with community partners providing immunizations. And so yes, we've seen impacts already.

We've also seen, if not slowing down, but the slowing of renewals for other contracts that we've had. And so, it's not that the work has stopped, but it's kind of been slowed down a little bit. And so we're seeing those types of temporary pauses as well — both from the state and federal government.

MEADOR: And what does CDC funding support in Minneapolis?

CHAPLIN: It supports a wide range of things for us — from public health infrastructure grants, to chronic disease, all the way to our public health emergency preparedness programs.

So, they cover a wide range of programs that support community in Minneapolis. And so, it'll be felt all over if the cuts are the proposed cuts are followed through.

MEADOR: And what would losing half your CDC funding mean for your department?

CHALIN: For us, it'll be catastrophic. We have a lot of our Programming is supported by federal grants. And losing that type of funding would mean that we would have to go back and talk to city administration on ways that we're going to be able to refortify the health department.

So those decisions haven't been made yet. But just on the face of it, almost 25% of our department is supported by federal grants so that would be challenging, nonetheless.

MEADOR: And what do you think about larger impacts nationwide?

CHAPLIN: Yeah, I think cuts to CDC...they have been the eyes and ears for local public health for a very long time. Without them, or their reduced capacity, we don't have the ability to talk to one another the way we have been in the past. We don't have the ability to share data internationally and nationally. And so, that information is super important. It helps us plan for disease, it helps us respond to disease, and it helps us develop prevention strategies for disease. And so, it's a big part of the work that we do.

MEADOR: And what communities will be hit hardest by these cuts?

CHAPLIN: Our most vulnerable communities — those communities that have the least ability to bounce back from incidences and outbreaks. If the Medicaid and Medicare cuts happen the way that they have been designed, you will see both impacts for our rural and our urban communities. Our rural communities have the challenge of geography, and our urban communities have the challenge of population.

MEADOR: With the budget process well underway, advocates say now is a critical time to speak up to help make sure final legislation doesn't include dramatic cuts for public health. Joining us now is Don Hoppert, APHA's director of government relations, to share how listeners can take action.

HOPPERT: Some of the most impactful things when I talk to staff on the Hill... is they say that when they hear from their constituents about particular issues, that's when they and the members of Congress listen up the most.

And so getting APHA members, other public health professionals, to contact their members of Congress, educate them about a what public health is, why it's so important, talk to them about

how CDC funding is benefiting their states and their congressional districts. We have examples of folks who do receive funding from CDC inviting members of Congress to visit programs so they can see how the funding is actually helping their constituents and their communities stay healthy and combat some of the significant health challenges that those particular states and congressional districts are seeing.

So yes, building that relationship, educating them, reminding them of the importance of this funding is really, really helpful. In particular this year, it's going to be more important than ever that constituents are speaking up, especially in the public health community, to really fight back against a lot of these proposed cuts that we're seeing from the administration.

MEADOR: Thanks to our guests for their time and expertise. For for more on how to take action in support of public health, visit apha.org/advocacy.

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