

Senate Appropriations Committee, LHHS Subcommittee

“A Review of the President’s Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Request for the National Institutes of Health”

Tuesday, June 10, 2025

Sen. Capito (R-WV) opening remarks:

- “Supporting biomedical research is a priority”
- Noted that the U.S. must remain a global leader in biomedical research; emphasized that the NIH is a driver of economic growth

Sen. Baldwin (D-WI) opening remarks:

- Emphasized the “catastrophic budget request” and that the NIH has terminated grants and funding, prevented research institutions from accessing existing grant funds, and allowed DOGE to decide which grants get terminated
- “This administration is cutting off live-saving research”

Dr. Bhattacharya opening remarks:

- Noted that despite NIH progress, life expectancy has flat lined in the past 10 years and chronic disease has increased
- Emphasized the public distrust that was evident following Covid-19
- “To restore [NIH’s] reputation amongst the American people and address the chronic disease crisis, we can’t return to business as usual”

Sen. Collins (R-ME):

- Noted that the administration’s proposed \$19 billion dollar cut is “disturbing”
- Questioned why the administration is proposing to cut funding for the National Institute On Aging given recent progress
 - o **Dr. Bhattacharya:** Emphasized that the intention of the administration is to be a leader in biomedical research and that the budget is a collaborative effort between Congress and the administration
- Stated that the proposed 15% cut on indirect costs is “so poorly conceived” and “against federal law”; questioned if Dr. Bhattacharya had the opportunity to assess alternative solutions
 - o **Dr. Bhattacharya:** Noted that he is aware of proposals and they are “quite promising”; can’t speak to 15% cut because of litigation; believes we should rethink how the federal government supports research institutions

Sen. Baldwin (D-WI):

- Highlighted that NIH grant making is significantly behind its normal pace; questioned who is withholding funding
 - o **Dr. Bhattacharya:** Stated that it's due to a range of decisions and changes in priorities
- Noted that OMB Director Russell Vought made major changes to how the NIH awards grants through "forward funding" making cuts even deeper; questioned why the NIH would implement such a policy
 - o **Dr. Bhattacharya:** Noted that forward funding allows for increased spending and more flexibility in the long run

Sen. Capito (R-WV):

- Highlighted the IDeA program to increase the geographic diversity of research in states that have difficulty securing research grants; asked about the value of the IDeA program
 - o **Dr. Bhattacharya:** Noted that the IDeA program is important for institutions who do not typically get large amounts of funding; stated it is "vital" for NIH investments to be spread across the nation to discourage group think; believes the IDeA program is less funded than it should be

Sen. Durbin (D-IL):

- "We lead the world in medical research, why would we give up on it?"

Sen. Moran (R-KS):

- Questioned how dollars would be spent if Congress were to provide additional funding
 - o **Dr. Bhattacharya:** Emphasized the need to focus on the "real health needs of the American people" and "address real problems in science" including the replication crisis

Sen. Merkley (D-OR):

- Noted that Advisory Council meetings for Alzheimer research centers were paused; asked about the interruption of grant funding
 - o **Dr. Bhattacharya:** "Working to turn on light switches"
- Emphasized the role of nurses and NIH research that has assessed staff ratios/ work conditions; questioned the proposal to eliminate the National Institute of Nursing Research
 - o **Dr. Bhattacharya:** Noted that restructuring decisions are done in collaborations with Congress; "the key question is not the structure of NIH but the collaborative nature of NIH"; emphasized that getting the research done matters more than where it happens

Sen. Britt (R-AL):

- Emphasized the importance of maternal health and the NIH IMRPOVE Act; asked about the causes of maternal health problems
 - o **Dr. Bhattacharya:** Noted a range of conditions, many of which he stated are preventable
- Noted that NIH grants are currently authorized on a year-to-year basis; emphasized the need for predictability and to stop rewarding “legacy contracts”; questioned how to ensure every dollar goes to discovery and not institutional overhead
 - o **Dr. Bhattacharya:** Suggested implementing a model in which overhead funds are integrated into competition
- Emphasized support for introducing competition into the indirect cost equation; questioned how that would bolster or break system
 - o **Dr. Bhattacharya:** Emphasized that it would help the system, assist researchers that have trouble getting support from NIH, and decrease group think

Sen. Murray (D-WA):

- Noted that the administration's actions are “catastrophic” for biomedical research
- Pressed Dr. Bhattacharya for numbers regarding the total number of NIH employees who have been fired/ left and the number of clinical trials impacted by delayed/ cancelled grants

Sen. Rounds (R-SD):

- Noted the value in allowing smaller institutions to compete for NIH grants; emphasized a need for clarity about what is considered direct vs. indirect cost
- Emphasized the potential role of AI in combating chronic disease; questioned how restructuring can strengthen AI
 - o **Dr. Bhattacharya:** Echoed that what matters most is not organization, but the continuation of activities

Sen. Schatz (D-HI):

- Noted that RFK Jr. has admitted that initial HHS cuts were “ideological” in nature; requested admission that this was originally too much of a cut and the possibility of systematically reversing the cuts
 - o **Dr. Bhattacharya:** Noted that he has established an appeals process, which will only take weeks and has already reversed many initial decisions
- Emphasized that the U.S. is losing researchers to friendly and unfriendly countries; asked why researchers should stay in the U.S.
 - o **Dr. Bhattacharya:** Emphasized that the U.S. is the primary funder of biomedical researcher