

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

A Comprehensive Organizational Analysis

Course: Intro to US Healthcare

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1. Executive Summary

The mission of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the country's main health agency, is to safeguard and improve the health and well-being of all Americans. Being one of the biggest federal agencies, HHS is tasked with a wide range of tasks, from emergency preparedness and social services to biological research and disease prevention. Along with the larger American health architecture, this research explores the organization's essential impact, strategic priorities, and organizational structure in great depth.

Updates from the March 2025 reorganization under the "Make America Healthy Again" initiative are included in this report. With the goal of streamlining operations and cutting bureaucracy, the reorganization lowered regional offices from ten to four and streamlined HHS from 28 divisions to 15. This study takes into account these changes while relying on the most recent data available in cases where thorough post-restructuring data is still unavailable.

2. Organization Name

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

It was first established in 1953 as the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. After the education activities were separated away for the newly established Department of Education, it underwent additional restructuring in 1979 to become the Department of Health and Human Services. HHS is an executive department at the executive branch level of the US federal government. In March 2025, HHS underwent a significant reorganization under the "Make America Healthy Again" initiative to streamline operations, reduce bureaucracy, and focus on chronic disease prevention.

3. Mission

The mission of the U.S. Health and Human Services department is broad and complex. *"To enhance the health and well-being of all Americans, by providing for effective health and human services and by fostering sound, sustained advances in the sciences underlying medicine, public health, and social service"* is the stated mission of HHS, according to official HHS documentation (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2025a).

This mission encompasses several key areas:

- Protecting public health through disease prevention and health promotion

- Ensuring access to quality healthcare services
- Advancing biomedical and behavioral research
- Providing essential human services to vulnerable populations
- Strengthening emergency preparedness and response capabilities

4. Vision

While HHS does not articulate a single, overarching vision statement, the department's strategic documents and leadership communications consistently emphasize a vision of an America that can be summed up as *“a nation where every person has access to affordable, high-quality care, where prevention and equity guide policy, and where scientific innovation ensures longer, healthier lives.”*

Where:

- Every individual has access to quality, affordable healthcare
- Communities are resilient and prepared for health emergencies
- Scientific innovation drives continuous improvement in health outcomes
- Health disparities are eliminated through equitable access to services
- Prevention and wellness are prioritized alongside treatment and care

The idea that health is a crucial component of both national prosperity and human dignity forms the basis of the department's goal.

5. Values

HHS bases its operations and decision-making on a number of fundamental principles, including:

Integrity and Transparency: upholding the highest moral standards in all operations and public relations interactions.

Excellence in Service: providing top-notch services and initiatives that address the various needs of Americans.

Innovation and Adaptability: embracing technological innovation and scientific progress to enhance health outcomes.

Collaboration and Partnership: collaborating successfully with community groups, companies, and state and local governments.

Equity and Inclusion: ensuring that all services and initiatives are available to a wide range of people, especially vulnerable and underprivileged groups.

Stewardship: Responsible use of public funds and accountability for outcomes.

6. Budget

HHS operates with one of the largest budgets in the federal government, reflecting its extensive responsibilities and wide-reaching programs.

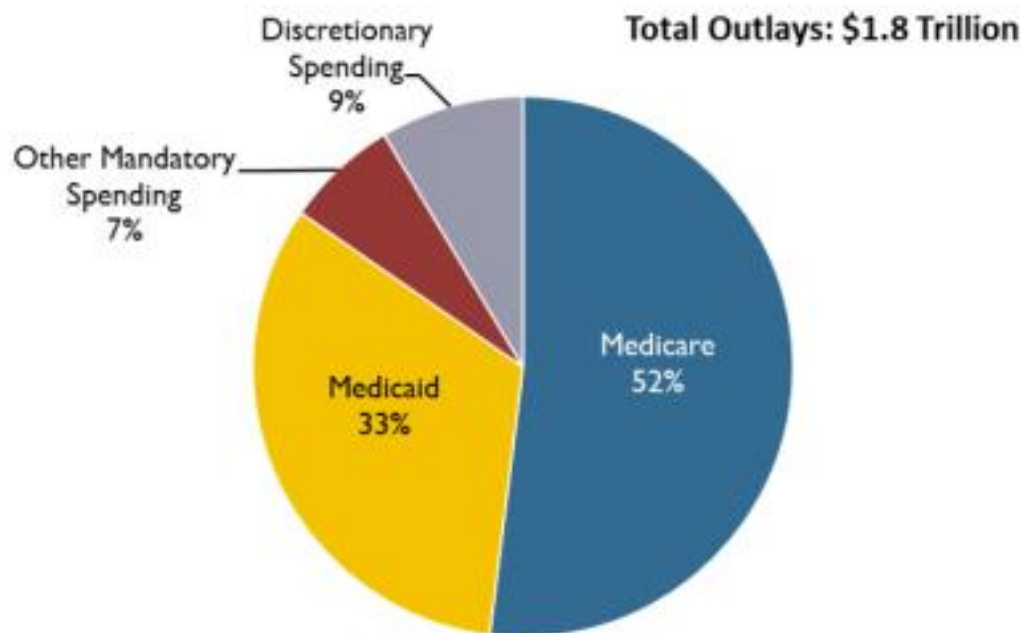


Figure 1: Department of Health and Human Services: FY2025 Budget Request (Congressional Research Service 2025)

6.1. Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Overview

The President's FY 2025 budget for HHS includes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2025b):

Total Budget Authority: Approximately \$1.8 trillion

- **Mandatory Programs:** \$1.7 trillion (primarily Medicare, Medicaid, and other entitlement programs)
- **Discretionary Programs:** \$130.7 billion

6.2. Major Budget Categories

Medicare: The largest component of HHS's budget, providing health insurance for Americans aged 65 and older, as well as younger individuals with disabilities.

Medicaid: A federal-state partnership providing healthcare coverage for low-income individuals and families.

Health Research: Significant investments in biomedical research through the National Institutes of Health (NIH), with funding for cancer research, infectious disease studies, and emerging health threats.

Public Health Infrastructure: Funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other agencies focused on disease prevention and health promotion.

Human Services: Support for programs addressing child welfare, aging services, and assistance for vulnerable populations.

The budget reflects HHS's commitment to both maintaining existing programs and investing in innovative approaches to improve health outcomes and reduce healthcare costs.

7. Organizational Map

HHS is organized as a large, complex organization with numerous staff offices and operational divisions. In an effort to cut off redundancy and boost productivity, HHS reorganized from 28 divisions to 15 in March 2025 as part of the "Make America Healthy Again" campaign. Although more consolidation details are being applied during 2025, the organizational structure outlined below follows an ordinary foundation.

7.1. Office of the Secretary

The Secretary of HHS serves as the department's chief executive, appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The Office of the Secretary includes various staff divisions that provide department-wide leadership and support.

7.2. Operating Divisions (12 Main Agencies)

Public Health Service Agencies:

- 1) **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):** Disease prevention and health promotion
- 2) **Food and Drug Administration (FDA):** Food safety, drug approval, and medical device regulation
- 3) **Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA):** Healthcare workforce and access programs
- 4) **National Institutes of Health (NIH):** Biomedical research

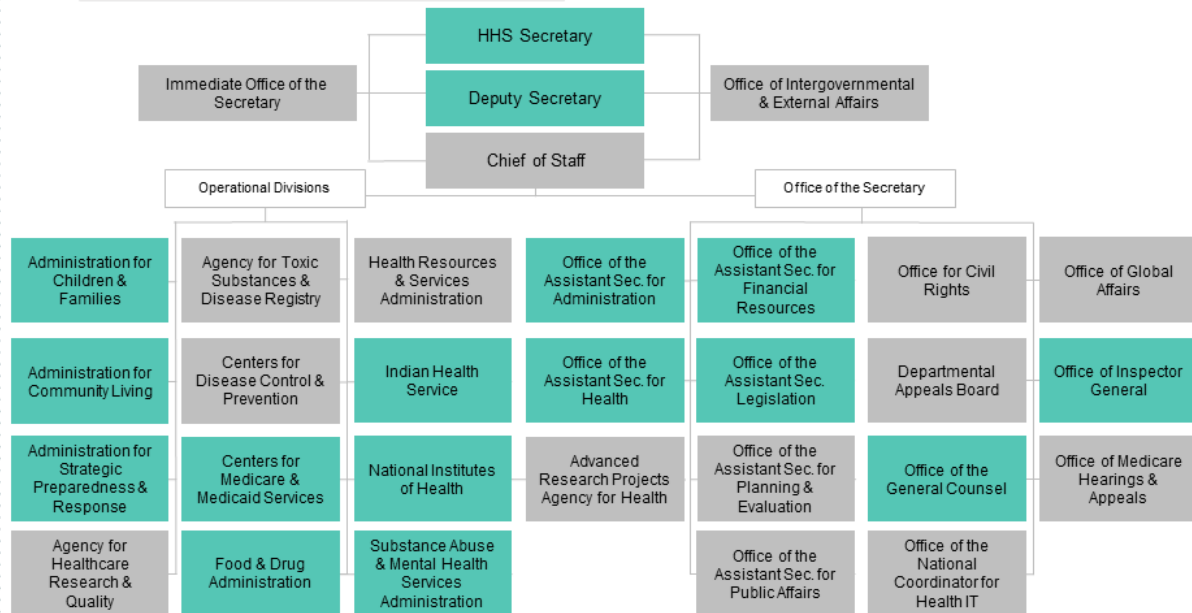
- 5) **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):** Mental health and substance abuse services
- 6) **Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR):** Environmental health protection
- 7) **Indian Health Service (IHS):** Healthcare for Native American and Alaska Native populations
- 8) **Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ):** Healthcare quality and safety research
- 9) **Office of Inspector General (OIG):** Oversight and fraud prevention

Human Services Agencies:

- 10) **Administration for Children and Families (ACF):** Child welfare and family support services
- 11) **Administration for Community Living (ACL):** Services for older adults and individuals with disabilities
- 12) **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS):** Administration of Medicare and Medicaid programs

Department of Health and Human Services

■ Requires Senate confirmation* ■ Political appointee



*Boxes with sub-agency departments refer to the head of that department

SOURCE: HHS, NIH, ACF
PRESENTATION CENTER 1/23/23

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Figure 2: Agency Org Chart: Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (National Journal September 2025)

7.3. Regional Structure

As part of the 2025 restructure that will close regional offices for greater efficiency, HHS now works through four regional offices across the United States, down from ten. The remaining regional offices will service larger geographic areas and are located in Philadelphia, Atlanta, Kansas City (MO), and Denver (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2025c). In addition to saving money and guaranteeing conformity with national standards and rules, this consolidation attempts to preserve the execution of federal programs at the state and local levels.

8. Strategic Plan

HHS's strategic approach is guided by comprehensive planning documents that establish priorities and measurable objectives. The Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) initiative, which focuses on transforming the food, health, and scientific systems to treat chronic diseases, is incorporated into the current plan (2022-2026, updated in 2025).

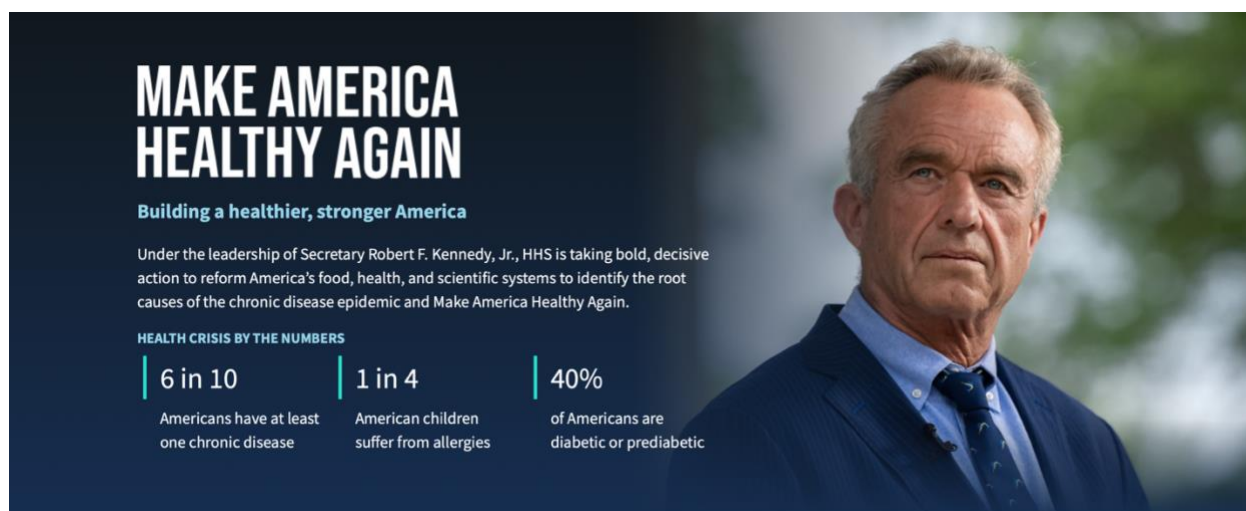


Figure 3: MAHA in action

8.1. Current Strategic Priorities

HHS organizes its priorities into several key focus areas. These priorities highlight not just the department's responsibilities but also the broader health challenges facing the nation. Current priorities include:

Strengthening Public Health Infrastructure: The country's public health system should be rebuilt and updated, with a focus on pandemic response and readiness (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024).

Advancing Health Equity: Removing structural obstacles that lead to health inequalities and guaranteeing that every community has access to high-quality medical care.

Supporting Behavioral Health: Increasing access to treatment programs for substance abuse and mental health issues, paying particular focus to the growing drug epidemic and new mental health issues.

Promoting Scientific Innovation: Speeding up biomedical research and the creation of innovative treatments, with a focus on cancer research, precision medicine, and newly developing infectious diseases.

Modernizing Healthcare Delivery: Encouraging the shift to value-based care models that put cost-effectiveness and patient outcomes first.

Addressing Chronic Disease Epidemic (under MAHA): With its emphasis on upstream prevention through food system changes, the elimination of hazardous chemicals from food sources, the updating of dietary guidelines based on current evidence, and the promotion of prevention-first approaches, the MAHA effort marks a significant shift in

HHS goals. Although this is in line with HHS's long-standing public health mandate, it raises possible conflicts with the processed food and pharmaceutical businesses, which have historically shaped departmental policies. The ability of MAHA to strike a balance between preserving HHS's current medical and scientific infrastructure and encouraging innovation in prevention will determine its effectiveness (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2025c; The White House, 2025).



Figure 4: HHS main page

8.2. Implementation Approach

HHS uses a mix of direct service delivery, grant programs, regulatory monitoring, and collaborations with state and local governments, educational institutions, and businesses to carry out its strategic aims.

In order to evaluate efficacy and direct efforts at continuous improvement, the department uses data-driven decision-making processes, comprehensive health surveillance systems, and program assessment approaches. The CDC's National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System, for example, allows for quick public health responses by tracking disease patterns in real-time. In a comparable fashion, CMS modifies Medicare payment structures and provides incentives to high-performing healthcare providers based on quality measures and patient outcomes data.

9. Strengths and Weaknesses

9.1. Organizational Strengths

Comprehensive Scope: Because of HHS's expansive obligation, related programs and services can be coordinated, and integrated approaches to health and human services are made possible.

Scientific Excellence: The department is home to internationally recognized research institutes, most notably the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which leads international efforts in biomedical research and development.

Emergency Response Capabilities: During the COVID-19 pandemic, HHS demonstrated its capacity to coordinate a nationwide public health response, from accelerating vaccine development through Operation Warp Speed to overseeing the distribution of hundreds of millions of vaccine doses (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2021).

Established Infrastructure: Years of program development have produced strong healthcare delivery systems, especially through the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

Professional Expertise: The department has highly skilled personnel from a variety of fields, including biomedical researchers and public health specialists.

9.2. Organizational Weaknesses

Complexity and Bureaucracy: The department's extensive scope and complicated organizational design may result in ineffectiveness, redundant work, and delayed decision-making. Note: The 2025 restructuring aims to address this by consolidating divisions, but implementation is ongoing.

Coordination Challenges: Maintaining efficient coordination and preventing overlap is still difficult with 12 operating divisions and multiple programs.

Public Trust Erosion: The COVID-19 outbreak brought to light the vulnerability of public trust. Misinformation, inconsistent messaging, and political division contributed to decreased vaccination rates and negativity about federal health agencies, despite the exceptional scientific achievement in vaccine research (KFF, 2025; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2025).

Political Vulnerability: HHS is vulnerable to political pressures and policy changes because it is a cabinet-level agency, which may cause instability in long-term planning and program implementation.

Resource Constraints: HHS continues to struggle to sufficiently support all of its programs and priorities, even with its sizable budget, especially in areas like behavioral health services and public health infrastructure.

Technology and Modernization Gaps: Efficiency and service delivery are impacted by certain HHS systems and procedures that lag behind modern technological capabilities.

10. Importance to the U.S. Health Care System

As the backbone of the American healthcare system, HHS performs a number of vital functions that go well beyond providing basic medical treatment.

Regulatory Leadership

HHS creates and implements regulations to guarantee the efficacy and safety of food supplies, medical devices, and healthcare services through organizations like the FDA and CMS. These regulatory duties uphold public trust in the healthcare system and offer crucial consumer protections.

Research and Innovation Hub

The greatest global source of financing for medical research is the National Institutes of Health, which is housed under HHS. Research funded by NIH has produced groundbreaking cures for a wide range of illnesses, including infectious disorders, cancer, and heart disease. The United States is positioned as a global leader in medical innovation thanks to this research function.

Safety Net Provider

Millions of Americans rely on HHS programs as their healthcare safety net, including Medicaid for low-income people, Medicare for the elderly, and specialty programs for vulnerable groups. Large segments of the population would not have access to necessary healthcare services in the absence of these initiatives.

Public Health Protection

In addition to coordinating responses to public health emergencies, the CDC and other HHS agencies keep an eye on disease epidemics and look into health hazards. Preventing the transmission of infectious illnesses and safeguarding public health depend on these processes.

Healthcare Quality and Accessibility

HHS strives to increase access to care, lower inequities, and improve healthcare quality through a number of programs and projects. Rural populations and underprivileged communities especially benefit from these initiatives.

Economic Impact

With more than 140 million Americans receiving healthcare coverage through Medicare and Medicaid alone, HHS programs have a substantial economic impact. In addition to offering necessary services, these initiatives help healthcare professionals, generate employment, and promote economic stability in local communities all around the country.

11. Overall Opinion and Reflection

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services serves as an example of the potential and difficulties associated with government-led healthcare initiatives. Three things, in my opinion as a healthcare technology MBA student, stand out: the department's current contributions to the healthcare system, its long-term effects on American lives, and the 2025 restructure.

11.1. The 2025 Restructuring

The 2025 reorganization, in my opinion, is an ambitious but dangerous attempt to place greater emphasis on chronic illness prevention as part of the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) initiative and streamline operations. While reducing regional offices and consolidating divisions may increase efficiency, there is a chance that local responsiveness and specialized knowledge may be weakened. From a healthcare technology standpoint, success will be determined by whether digital infrastructure, data systems, and accessible tools are built to support this simplified structure. The restructure could modernize HHS operations if it is handled well; if not, it could lead to service gaps and weaken the public's trust.

11.2. Long-Term Impact on American Lives

In retrospect, HHS has continuously changed the American healthcare system during the last few decades. Access to care for the aged, crippled, and low-income groups was revolutionized by Medicare and Medicaid. Millions of people now have more coverage thanks to the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, which also established new accountability and quality standards.

The COVID-19 pandemic more recently put HHS's capacity to coordinate a national emergency response to the test. The pandemic also exposed significant flaws in agency

cooperation and public health messaging, despite the department's crucial role in speeding up vaccine development and distribution (HHS, 2021; KFF, 2025). It was, in my opinion, an important moment: children vaccination rates fell below 95% for the first time in many areas, and public confidence in health institutions was undermined (CDC, 2025). Americans' perceptions of HHS and the healthcare system as a whole are still shaped by its legacy of mistrust.

11.3. How HHS Contributes Today

Currently, HHS plays a number of roles in the American healthcare system. Through the human services, Medicare, and Medicaid programs, it provides a **safety net** for disadvantaged populations. As a **regulator**, it safeguards the public by guaranteeing the safety of medications, medical equipment, and food supplies. It drives **scientific advancement** through the NIH and other organizations, leading to the development of cures and treatments that impact health around the world. Additionally, it boosts the economy by helping community organizations, clinics, and hospitals that employ millions of people.

The department's current contributions were likewise altered by COVID-19. In addition to keeping an eye on disease outbreaks, HHS is now responsible for restoring public trust in vaccines and public health recommendations. In an effort to rebuild confidence and get ready for future crises, it is working to increase openness, expand mental health services, and fortify surveillance mechanisms (KFF, 2025). These contributions show why, despite historic obstacles, HHS is still vital because it protects health, fosters innovation, and supports the general well-being of the country.

12. Conclusion

Almost every American's health, well-being, and financial stability are directly impacted by the work of HHS, making it an essential institution in American society. The department's size, complexity, and political climate present constant challenges, but it also makes significant and vital contributions to social services, medical research, and public health.

The department needs to continuously evolve and improve in order to address the health issues of the twenty-first century and maintain America's leadership position in global health initiatives. An aging population that will put a strain on Medicare and long-term care systems, new infectious disease threats that call for quick response capabilities, expanding mental health crises that call for more services, and enduring health disparities that call for consistent, equity-focused interventions are just a few of the significant obstacles that HHS will face in the future. The effectiveness of the

department in safeguarding and enhancing American health for future generations will ultimately depend on its capacity to strike a balance between traditional healthcare delivery and creative prevention strategies, restore public confidence while upholding scientific integrity, and adjust to technological advancements while providing care for vulnerable populations.

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