

CDC's ability to prevent injuries like drowning, traumatic brain injury and falls is severely compromised by Trump cuts

Greta Massetti, Professor of Population Health Sciences, Georgia State University

Published: October 29, 2025 8:28am EDT



Motor vehicle crashes kill more than 40,000 people in the U.S. every year.

Cavan Images/Getty Images

Much has been written about the unprecedented impact that the second Trump administration has had on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, from massive job cuts and entire programs being wiped out to leadership shake-ups and the undermining of science. But behind every headline, countless stories have gone untold about the real-world impacts that these changes will have on everyday people.

I'm a public health expert who spent 18 years as a scientist at the CDC. I see the systematic dismantling of the agency as a significant risk to the country's ability to keep Americans safe and give medical professionals the data needed to keep them that way.

Most of my time at the CDC was spent in the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, one of the hardest hit of the agency's programs. The center has lost more than half of its staff through layoffs alone and as many as two-thirds when other reductions are accounted for.

Injuries affect people of all ages

More Americans die from injuries and violence in the first half of life than from any other cause, including cancer, HIV or the flu. These include suicide, overdose, homicide and unintentional injuries.

The mass layoffs that the Trump administration has carried out in 2025 struck at the core of the injury center's programs on violence prevention and eliminated the work being done to prevent unintentional injuries like drowning, traumatic brain injuries, falls in older adults and motor vehicle crashes.

As of late October, only the CDC programs focused on overdose prevention, suicide and the National Violent Deaths Reporting System remain in the injury center.

Unintentional injuries cost the U.S. \$4.5 trillion annually and directly affect workforce and community stability. This includes \$323 billion in medical care as well as costs from lost work productivity.

Every unintentional injury represents a preventable tragedy — a fall, a crash, a drowning — that alters the course of a life. Like me, many Americans are eager for information about keeping their loved ones safe.

Making youth sports safer

One critical injury center program that was cut from CDC in April is its HEADS UP program, which is aimed at preventing and reducing head trauma. The program includes online courses for youth coaches, health care providers, schools, athletic trainers and others that provide information about how to protect kids from concussions and other serious brain injuries.

Traumatic brain injury affects more than 230,000 people in the U.S. A traumatic brain injury is a disruption in the normal function of the brain that can be caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head, or a penetrating head injury.

People of all ages are at risk of experiencing a traumatic brain injury. For young people, concussions from contact sports account for 45% of all emergency department visits for a traumatic brain injury each year.



Concussions in youth contact sports are the cause of nearly half of all traumatic brain injury emergency room visits annually.

SDI Productions/E+ via Getty Images

HEADS UP specifically aims to create education and awareness around youth traumatic brain injuries. Currently, 45 states recommend or require HEADS UP materials or training to be used by sports programs and schools in their concussion prevention laws.

The elimination of the CDC's injury prevention team will undoubtedly result in a loss of progress in preventing these avoidable injuries. It will also leave gaps in states whose coaches are unable to fulfill their training requirements.

Preventing drownings

Drowning is the No. 1 cause of death for children ages 1 to 4, and fatal and nonfatal drownings cost the U.S. \$56 billion each year. Drowning deaths have been increasing steadily among young children since 2019.

When CDC's drowning prevention team was eliminated, the injury center was the only federal public health department focused on preventing drowning.

It did so on a shoestring: With only \$2 million annually appropriated by Congress, the team stretched every penny to maximize its impact on public health by strengthening data systems and supporting communities in getting access to lifesaving swimming and water safety skills.

Every drowning death of a young child is a preventable, costly tragedy.

The critical work of the CDC's drowning prevention team brought critical lifesaving work to communities across America by providing water safety skills and training to more than 22,000 children in 2024 alone. At a cost of just \$110 per child, teaching a child to swim reduces their risk of drowning by up to 88%.



Drowning deaths have been rising in young children.

fadfebian/iStock via Getty Images Plus

Keeping older adults safe from falls

Injuries also affect older adults in significant ways.

Falls are the leading cause of injury and death among adults age 65 and over, and 1 of 4 older adults falls each year. Falls result in hospitalizations, hip fractures and traumatic brain injuries, which can be debilitating and deadly for older adults.

A CDC program known as STEADI – short for Stopping Early Accidents, Deaths and Injuries – provides educational materials to make preventing falls a routine part of clinical care that doctors provide. Staff cuts resulted in the elimination of STEADI.

In the U.S. \$2 out of every \$3 of the \$80 billion spent in medical costs on falls are paid by Medicare, representing 9% of the total Medicare spending on older adults.

Strategies aimed at reducing falls in older adults are key to lowering Medicare spending, showing how the critical work of the CDC is essential to reducing health care costs to individuals and taxpayers.



About 9% of Medicare spending in older adults stems from falls.

sasirin pamai/iStock via Getty Images Plus

Safer roads for drivers and pedestrians

In the U.S., motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death, killing more than 100 people every day and over 40,000 people each year. In 2023, deaths from road crashes resulted in an estimated \$457 billion in medical costs and expenses.

Experts at CDC's injury center developed tools for helping to better track and monitor motor vehicle crash injuries. This work made it possible for states to look at trends in transportation-related injuries within hours instead of waiting for the previous two- to three-year lag in data.

Before this program was eliminated by the Trump administration, CDC's experts created resources for parents of teen drivers like me to keep their teens safe on the road. They also shared information to improve the safety of child passengers and older adult drivers.

Turning complex data into usable information

When health care providers and others face questions about keeping children and adults safe, they have long turned to the CDC to translate complex information into practical, actionable advice.

For instance, CDC's clinical guidance helped improve diagnosis of mild traumatic brain injuries in children and teens and has guided doctors in emergency rooms and clinics to provide consistent, high-quality care to their patients. CDC experts also provided data on emergency department visits due to drowning injuries and practical resources for doctors and pharmacists to identify patients at risk of falls.

As a public health expert, I see the deep cuts to CDC's injury prevention programs as serious threats to public health broadly. As a mother, sister, daughter and neighbor, I worry that my loved ones and their doctors will not have the information and resources they need to stay healthy and injury-free.

Greta Massetti does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

This article is republished from The Conversation under a Creative Commons license.