

Union of Concerned Scientists

Science for a Healthy Planet and Safer World

[en español](#)

HHS Restricts Scientific Information on the Affordable Care Act



What happened: According to a report by the Web Integrity Project, an arm of the Sunlight Foundation, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under the Trump administration has conducted at least 26 instances of censoring information on various HHS websites, including statistical data, on the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) impact to public health.

Why it matters: Taxpayer money should not be used to restrict access to critical scientific information and data on the impacts of the ACA. This form of censorship represents a risk to the public's health and safety by decreasing the ability of the public to become better informed on the impacts of a law that governs the American healthcare system.

From their official websites, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has eliminated statistics and data on the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) impact to public health, thereby taking away

the public's ability to obtain accurate and comprehensive public health information. As documented by the [Web Integrity Project](#), an arm of the Sunlight Foundation, at least 26 instances of censorship (excised words, removed links, altered paragraphs, and removed pages) were carried out on HHS websites for information concerning the ACA (also known as Obamacare) since the inauguration of President Trump. In addition to cutting scientific information, it is important to note that non-scientific information was also cut, including removing the term 'Affordable Care Act' from many webpages; taking down information on rights guaranteed under the ACA; and removing links to the federal government's main platform for enrolling in ACA coverage, HealthCare.gov.

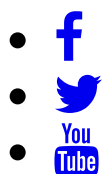
One particular area of concern involves the obscuring of online information about contraceptive coverage, which could have serious public health implications. One of the agencies under HHS, the Office of Population Affairs, removed several ACA-related webpages, including one entitled "Contraceptive Coverage." While much of the information from this removed site ended up in "Women's Preventive Services" page, some of the science-based information on contraceptives were permanently removed. The removed text featured information that is widely supported by the scientific community, such as there "are proven health benefits for women that come from using contraception" and that while nearly all women in the US have at some point relied on contraception, more than 50% of women ages 18-34 "have struggled to afford it."

Several sub-agencies in HHS have also removed statistics in which the data happened to show a beneficial impact of ACA. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid removed the reporting of statistics which showed how the ACA's expansion led to an increase in the percentage of people who obtained health insurance coverage. The Health Resources and Services Administration also removed statistics related to how the uninsured rate declined, specifically in women, due to the implementation of the ACA. Additionally, the HHS employees who oversee HHS.gov have [removed information](#) that provided the public with the summaries of benefits, emergency services, doctor choice, and state-by-state specific impacts of the ACA. In particular, HHS employees removed from HHS.gov statistics on how the implementation of the ACA led to a reduction in the number of uninsured people from vulnerable populations, like Latinx and women.

According to the [Office of Management and Budget \(OMB\)](#), federal agency websites and other digital services are the "primary means by which the public receives information from and interacts with the Federal Government" and therefore, federal websites should always "provide quality information that is readily accessible to all." The public should be able to turn to official websites for reliable scientific information and data about the programs and services they use. The Trump administration is placing politics above health by restricting access to scientific information and data that have a direct impact on the health and safety of Americans across the country.

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