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Conservative group launches ad campaign against Cleveland Clinic’s DEI initiatives

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The conservative nonprofit Consumers' Research has launched a six-figure advertising campaign criticizing the Cleveland Clinic as “the wokest hospital in America.” This is an image from the ad.

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By

- [Julie Washington, cleveland.com](#)

CLEVELAND, Ohio — Amid the Trump Administration’s push to curtail diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, a conservative group has launched a six-figure advertising campaign criticizing the Cleveland Clinic as “the wokest hospital in America” and one that “prioritizes politics over patients.”

The first salvo in the campaign, backed by the conservative nonprofit [Consumers’ Research](#), is a TV ad accusing the Clinic of prioritizing patients based on skin color, performing child sex changes and pushing transgender propaganda. The ad is slated to air during Wednesday’s Cleveland Cavaliers versus Toronto Raptors game.

[The anti-DEI message](#) is part of an ad campaign that includes a website, and mobile billboards outside of the Clinic’s main campus, the Ohio Statehouse and the Florida state capitol, Consumers’ Research said in a news release.

In a statement, the Clinic characterized the Virginia-based Consumers’ Research campaign as filled with inaccuracies.

“For example, Cleveland Clinic does not provide gender-affirming surgeries for patients under the age of 18,” the Clinic said. “We do not discriminate or create preferences based on race, gender or any other characteristics, and we abide by ethical and legal standards of care with respect to our delivery of healthcare services. Cleveland Clinic is a nonpartisan organization and we neither have nor promote a political agenda.”

The TV spot is an attack ad more typically seen in political campaigns, said Tom Sutton, professor of political science at Baldwin Wallace University. “It’s using innuendo to make claims that are inaccurate or simply untrue,” Sutton said.

“And while it’s not a political ad, it’s part of a campaign by the Trump administration and supporting groups to intimidate large organizations like the Clinic into eliminating any references whatsoever to diversity, equity and inclusion,” Sutton said.

The Consumers’ Research ad campaign also may be an attempt to intimidate organizations in the private sector into accepting new federal policies without pushing back, Sutton said.

“If there are decisions to cut back on Medicare payments or the funding for pharmaceutical subsidies, places like the Clinic -- having faced an attack like this publicly -- may be less inclined to lobby against those efforts,” he said.

The Consumers’ Research-backed Consumers First Initiative, launched in 2021, “is now setting its sights on the healthcare system and its role in pushing a radical agenda instead of prioritizing patients,” the organization said in a news release.

The campaign aligns with the federal government’s recent attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI.

[Last month](#), President Donald Trump issued executive orders to end to all government spending on DEI programs, calling them “radical and wasteful.”

Meanwhile, corporations across the country have [rolled back](#) their DEI programs, including tech giants like Google and Amazon, and retailers like Walmart and Target. [On Wednesday, PBS](#) said it was closing its Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) office, and Goldman Sachs dropped its DEI rule.

The campaign from Consumers’ Research linked to past Clinic press releases about its Florida health clinic designed exclusively for the LGBTQ+ community, a podcast exploring empathy and inclusivity featuring the Clinic’s chief of diversity and inclusion, and a letter signed by Clinic CEO [Dr. Tom Mihaljevic](#) stating, in part, “We must embrace diversity, champion human rights and lead with humility and inclusiveness.”

“The Clinic must make affordable, quality health care its only focus,” said Consumers’ Research executive director Will Hild in a statement.

“The Clinic’s leadership alarmingly proclaims that DEI ‘has to be embedded in everything that we do.’ Such a sentiment plagues the entire hospital system and should frighten every patient in need of its services,” Hild said. “From unethical race-based care to transgender mutilation surgeries on kids to bowing at the altar of climate extremism, Cleveland Clinic seems hell-bent on satisfying every woke fixation while cost-reduction for patients is a distant afterthought.”

Consumers’ Research is one of several dark-money groups that seek to influence policy without disclosing their donors, according to [CNBC](#).

In 2021, the group launched an ad [campaign](#) to combat “wokeness”-- a term meaning awareness of social issues -- in corporate America, targeting Ticketmaster, Coca-Cola, Nike and others, according to its website and news stories at the time.

In 2023, Consumers’ Research was also part of a conservative push to prevent major U.S. companies from factoring climate change into major investment decisions, news reports said.

Consumers’ Research and other opponents of “woke capitalism” see themselves as “part of a political alliance that can scrutinize and possibly derail” the environmental and social goals of businesses, the [Post](#) reported.

Julie Washington covers healthcare for cleveland.com. [Read previous stories at this link.](#)



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