

April 7, 2025

# Terminated Grants May Mark the Beginning of Really Bad News to Come

**A letter from David A. Brenner, MD, President and CEO of Sanford Burnham Prebys**

From the proposed across-the-board cap on indirect costs to freezing study sections to backing away from promising new technologies like mRNA vaccines, recent actions by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) threaten the future of U.S. science.

The number of new grants handed out by the [National Science Foundation](#) has fallen by 50 percent. Last year, the [NIH awarded](#) approximately \$2.5 billion in grants in the first six weeks of 2024. This year, it was \$1.4 billion for the same period—a sum smaller than any of the previous six years.

But the past and present are also at risk, and specifically the forced abandonment of research already conducted or underway that has significantly advanced our understanding of many diseases and public health threats.

At the direction of the current administration and reportedly often without expert NIH staff input or review, [hundreds of previously approved](#) research grants have been terminated. These are projects that had already been vetted by experts and deemed worthy of support and further investigation.

The research goals of these terminated grants had not yet been fully realized. Data was still being gathered; final outcomes were yet to be determined. The grants were cancelled, according to the administration, because the funding promised but not yet provided could be reclaimed as “savings.”



It's clear these grants were targeted as part of a larger political agenda. On-going research to develop better vaccines (not just COVID-19, but vaccines for conditions like shingles and other common afflictions), better understanding of vaccine hesitancy, alleviation of anxiety and depression among transgender and gender-minority teens, improved health care for under-represented groups and [HIV prevention](#) were all gutted.

These grant terminations, utterly lacking in scientific rationale, create real and immediate consequences.

They create waste and lost time. There is no value to research half-completed, before it can gather statistically relevant and useful data necessary to arrive at valuable conclusions, insights and actions.

The clawing back of promised funding means laboratories and institutions are suddenly unable to afford to press ahead. Without vital funding, faculty and staff face lay-offs and perhaps the shuttering of entire labs. The actions chill the ambitions of young scientists we need for future innovations that will drive our economy in the coming decades. An entire generation of scientists is in danger.

Most ominously, the grant terminations put us all at greater risk. For example, there will be future pandemics. They are inevitable. Preparation is critical. Because of years of research into mRNA vaccines, safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines were created in record time and [saved millions of lives](#).

Likewise with HIV. Thanks to recent decades of HIV research, AIDS is now more of a chronic condition than a death sentence. But it is beyond foolish to think that the ever-changing viruses that cause COVID-19, AIDS and other global scourges will stop threatening public health just because we've stopped conducting research to fight back.

The administration asserts that spending money on research for COVID-19 and similar infectious diseases is a waste. The pandemic is over, says President Trump, who has made that declaration [many times](#) going back to its earliest days.

It is true that the COVID-19 pandemic was officially declared ended by the World Health Organization on [May 11, 2023](#) because it no longer met the defining criteria of "pandemic." But the virus still killed [2,130 people in the U.S.](#) last month and thousands more worldwide. The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus still circulates, still mutates and may again emerge as a worldwide menace.

Or something like it. We hear sirens warning of the next pandemic in the nightly news: Ebola, mPox and unknown infections identified in Africa. Avian flu and resurgent measles spreading in our own country. Viruses recognize no borders or limits.

Current grant terminations and those to come that target other efforts for non-scientific reasons will only make us weaker, which is always a welcome sign for opportunistic pathogens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David A. Brenner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**David A. Brenner, MD**  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Donald Bren Chief Executive Chair