

As a Diversity Grant Dies, Young Scientists Fear It Will Haunt Their Careers

Nearly 200 young scientists have had their research and job prospects jeopardized by termination of the NIH's MOSAIC grant program.

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Adelaide Tovar, a University of Michigan scientist who researches genes related to diabetes, used to feel like an impostor in a laboratory. Tovar, 32, grew up poor and was the first in her family to graduate from high school. During her first year in college, she realized she didn't know how to study.

But after years of studying biology and genetics, Tovar finally got proof that she belonged. Last fall, the National Institutes of Health [awarded her a prestigious grant](#). It would fund her research and put her on track to be a university professor and eventually launch a laboratory of her own.

"I felt like receiving the award was a form of acceptance, like I had finally made it," Tovar said. "But I think many of us now fear that this is going to poison the rest of our careers."

Tovar is one of nearly 200 young scientists across the nation whose research and job prospects have been jeopardized by the sudden termination of the NIH's MOSAIC grant program, one of many ended by sweeping cuts across the federal scientific agencies. The grant was created by the first Trump administration to foster a new generation of diverse scientists in biomedical research, then defunded in the second Trump administration's ongoing purge of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs.

In interviews with KFF Health News, Tovar and three other grant recipients worried that the loss of funding — coupled with President Donald Trump's crusade against diversity programs — may transform a grant that was supposed to jump-start their careers into a blemish on their résumés that could cost them the jobs and funding that make their research possible.

"We might end up blacklisted by the NIH because of having this award — for who we are," said Erica Rodriguez, 35, a grant recipient at Columbia University who conducts brain research that could lead to a better understanding of psychiatric disorders.

“Because not only is it for people with diverse backgrounds,” she said, “but it’s for people who advocate for other people with diverse backgrounds.”

The MOSAIC program — short for “[Maximizing Opportunities for Scientific and Academic Independent Careers](#)” — was created in 2019 to provide early-career support to promising scientists from “underrepresented backgrounds” with a long-term goal to “enhance diversity in the biomedical research workforce,” according to NIH grant documents.

The five-year grant was awarded to scientists who have finished their doctorates and work in research laboratories at universities across the country. In the first two years, scientists generally receive \$100,000 to \$150,000, which is largely used to pay their salaries.

By the third year, the scientists are expected to have been hired as a professor, likely at a different university, where the grant funding helps them launch their own research lab. In the final three years of the grant, funding increases to about \$250,000 a year, which is used to buy supplies and hire other young scientists to work in the lab, completing the cycle.

MOSAIC awardees were chosen using a broad definition of diversity beyond race, gender, and disability. It includes those who grew up in poor households or rural areas or were raised by parents who do not have college degrees. Many of those chosen for the grant also have a history of supporting other budding scientists from underrepresented backgrounds.

MOSAIC funds research on cancer, Alzheimer’s disease, spinal cord injuries, cochlear implants, fentanyl overdoses, stroke recovery, neurodevelopmental disorders, and more.

But in recent weeks the NIH has notified most MOSAIC recipients that the program was “terminated” and their funding will end by this summer, regardless of the years left on their grant, according to NIH emails reviewed by KFF Health News. Other awardees have received no official notification and only learned through word of mouth that their funding was canceled.

Vianca Rodriguez Feliciano, a spokesperson for the Department of Health and Human Services, confirmed in an email statement to KFF Health News that MOSAIC had been defunded. She said the grants “no longer align” with agency priorities or the [president’s executive orders](#) “eliminating wasteful, ideologically driven DEI initiatives.”

Trump signed one of those orders on his first day back in the White House, instructing the entire federal government to end programs that promoted diversity, referring to them as “shameful,” “immoral,” and an “immense public waste.”

Diversity programs have been slashed across the government, including at the NIH and other HHS agencies, which have [canceled hundreds of grants](#) worth billions of dollars since March. On April 21, the NIH [issued a notice](#) that banned recipients from receiving grants if they have DEI programs and said the agency could “recover all funds” from those that do not comply.

“At HHS, we are dedicated to restoring our agencies to their tradition of gold-standard, evidence-based science – not one driven by political ideology,” Rodriguez Feliciano said. “We will leave no stone unturned in identifying the root causes of the chronic disease epidemic as part of our mission to Make America Healthy Again.”

Many MOSAIC scientists are focused on chronic diseases. Tovar, for example, researches specific genes that make people more susceptible to diabetes, which affects [about 38 million Americans](#).

“We have a lot of treatments for diabetes that are great for the people that they work for,” Tovar said. “In my research, I use genetics to help find better drug targets so we can find medicines for people who don’t already have therapies that work.”

In interviews, Tovar and the other MOSAIC recipients described how the sudden loss of funding will throw research and careers into upheaval: Some postdoctoral researchers may lose their current jobs when funding runs dry in months; awardees competing for professor jobs will lose research funding that made them stronger candidates; and those already hired will have less money for salaries and supplies in their research labs.

Ashley Albright, 32, who grew up poor in rural North Carolina, is now a scientist at the University of California-San Francisco, where she studies *Stentor coeruleus*, a large single-celled organism with regenerative abilities. She plans to start applying for professor jobs this fall.

Albright said MOSAIC funding would have given her a “better shot at my dream,” which was to give other scientists from diverse backgrounds opportunities to work in her research lab.

“I feel crushed,” she said. “I feel like someone is stepping on half of my life. ... I’ve spent the last 10 years in grad school and my postdoc working toward this so I can do science, but also help other people do science.”

Hannah Grunwald, 33, a grant recipient at Harvard who studies eyeless cave fish to better understand complex genetic traits, said one of her worst fears was that universities won’t hire MOSAIC awardees at a time when the White House is ordering schools to abandon DEI programs and withholding billions from those that do not bend to the Trump agenda.

“There has been an enormous debate in our community about what we should say on our résumés,” Grunwald said. “I just don’t know if having my grant canceled because it had to do with diversity is going to limit my ability to get funding in the future.”

The termination of MOSAIC drew quick condemnation from several scientific organizations that receive grant funding to work closely with the awarded scientists, with some calling it “[short-sighted](#)” and “[a significant step backward](#).”

Mary Munson, president of the American Society for Cell Biology, who has mentored awardees since MOSAIC began, became choked up and covered her face with her hands as she considered the possibility the grant could end up holding them back.

“Taking this grant away now does not take away the fact that they won this competitive award. It doesn’t take away that they are amazing scientists,” Munson said. “I hope that institutions will still see that nonetheless.”

Stefano Bertuzzi, CEO of the American Society for Microbiology, which also mentors grant awardees, said the mass termination of MOSAIC and other NIH grants may have a cumulative effect that will stifle scientific innovation for decades.

Bertuzzi, who immigrated from Italy in the '90s because of America’s robust funding for science, said scientists will not stay in or flock to a nation where research funding vanishes on a political whim.

“We are going to be losing a full generation of scientists,” Bertuzzi said. “Other countries in the world will thrive.”

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