

Health Department Ends Research Using Fetal Tissue From Abortions

Scientists worry that ending the federally funded research will slow advancements made against cancer, HIV, diabetes and other diseases.

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The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will no longer permit or fund [research](#) using abortion-derived human fetal tissue, [according to a recent HHS announcement](#).

This tissue, which would otherwise be discarded, gives scientists insight into the development of human tissues and organs, making it invaluable for understanding various life-threatening diseases, including [HIV](#) and [cancer](#).

“This decision is about advancing science by investing in breakthrough technologies more capable of modeling human health and disease,” said Jay Bhattacharya, MD, PhD, director of the National Institutes of Health, an agency within the HHS.

Despite the growing availability of other methodologies like three-dimensional cell cultures and computational biology, scientists worry that the new restrictions will slow progress in medical advancements.

“If you want to make fetal kidney cell types for further development for a disease study, you have to have actual fetal kidney to compare the stuff you made, but it remains very difficult to fully recapitulate the complexity of human tissue,” said Lawrence Goldstein, PhD, a neuroscientist at the University of California San Diego, [in an interview with Nature about the recent restrictions](#).

The International Society for Stem Cell Research (ISSCR) responded to the NIH policy by asking the HHS to reconsider and discuss the decision with the scientific community.

“This research is also governed by a well-established ethical and legal framework that includes

rigorous scientific review, robust informed consent and prohibition of profit from tissue donation,” said the ISSCR.

This policy is part of an ongoing effort by the Trump administration to restrict research using fetal tissue. In 2018, the administration temporarily banned scientists employed by the NIH from acquiring new human fetal tissue samples for experiments. The ban negatively impacted HIV and cancer research, [according to Science](#). The following year, the administration required an ethical review of and placed restrictions on NIH grants involving fetal tissue despite warnings from researchers that using the tissue is the only way to study some health problems. When Trump left office, these changes were reversed.

Since the first Trump administration, research involving fetal tissue has declined, reports The Associated Press. In 2025, the NIH funded only 77 projects that used fetal tissue.

Research that will no longer be funded by the NIH include projects on viral infections, diabetes, rare cancers and HIV.