

First Focus on Children

Questions for HELP Committee budget hearing with HHS Secretary Kennedy

April 2026

### *Vaccines*

- A preliminary injunction was granted in a case brought by the American Academy of Pediatrics and other organizations to block and reverse the arbitrary and capricious actions under your leadership to gut the childhood vaccine, ACIP, and CDC's disease surveillance and control programs. On April 9th, 2026, a new charter for ACIP was posted to the CDC website that would warp the purpose and procedures of ACIP to more closely align with your past anti-vaccine views. **If you are following "gold standard science" as you've often said, why did you need to violate administrative procedures and why do you need to recharter ACIP? If you are only acting in alignment with the best science, why do you need to bend ACIP's rules and weaken its vetting process in order to find experts for the panel?**
- The President has nominated Dr. Erica Schwartz to head the CDC. She has 24 years of experience in the US Public Health Service Commissioned Corps and has led disease surveillance and vaccination programs, even writing policy on pandemic influenza and other viral outbreaks. She's also previously served in the first Trump Administration as deputy Surgeon General. **If Dr. Schwartz recommends restoring the child immunization schedule, ACIP, and the CDC's public campaign encouraging vaccination against changes made under your leadership - will you implement her recommendation? Would you consider firing Dr. Schwartz if she opposes your views on vaccines, like you did with Dr. Susan Monarez?**

### *Coverage/Medicaid and CHIP*

- According to a National Survey on Children's Health conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, about 14.1 million children in the U.S. have special health care needs, representing 19.4% of all children. Medicaid is the largest payer for these children's health services. **How are you ensuring that children with special health care needs, including those with disabilities, continue to receive comprehensive coverage under Medicaid?**
- Your uncle, President John F. Kennedy, called America a 'nation of immigrants.' However, immigrant children in the U.S. face barriers to accessing essential health care services. **Do you support ensuring access to care is protected regardless of immigration status for immigrant children and pregnant women?**
- Nearly all children in foster care are eligible for Medicaid. These children often have more complex health needs than their peers, with higher rates of chronic health conditions, developmental delays, and mental health issues. **What specific measures are you taking to ensure that foster youth receive comprehensive care through Medicaid?**

- EPSDT is a mandatory benefit under Medicaid that provides comprehensive and preventive health care services for children under age 21. However, studies show that many eligible children do not receive all recommended EPSDT services. **What actions are you taking to ensure robust enforcement of the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit in Medicaid, which is crucial for children's preventive care? What specific steps will you take to improve enforcement of the EPSDT benefit?**

#### *Health Disparities*

- More than half of children who identify as Native American, Black, Hispanic, or multiracial have Medicaid as their source of health insurance. Children of color in the United States face an array of health disparities, including higher rates of chronic conditions such as asthma, obesity, diabetes, and hypertension. **How are you addressing racial and ethnic disparities in children's health outcomes, particularly within Medicaid and CHIP programs?**

#### *Maternal and Infant Health*

- CHIP covers approximately 7 million children and pregnant women. **Given the critical role of CHIP in maternal and child health, what steps are you taking to ensure its continued funding and expansion?**
- The U.S. continues to face alarming rates of infant and maternal mortality, particularly among communities of color. **What are you doing to support robust funding for programs like Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program or CHIP, the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block Grant and other initiatives to reduce racial disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes?**
- The Healthy Start program, administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), is the nation's only federally funded, community-based program solely focused on reducing infant mortality and improving maternal health. Healthy Start targets communities experiencing the highest rates of infant mortality—more than 1.5 times the national average. With 115 sites across 38 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico, Healthy Start provides intensive clinical and social services to over 50,000 pregnant women and their babies—from pregnancy through 18 months postpartum. **The President's FY26 and FY27 budgets proposals both proposed eliminating the Healthy Start program - Congress rejected that proposal for FY26 and actually approved a slight increase in funding for Healthy Start. How can you defend a proposal to eliminate funding for a program that reduces the number of infant and maternal deaths across our country?**

### *Mental Health*

- There has been a growing push to restrict adolescents' access to critical health services such as mental health care and reproductive health care without parental consent. **How are you addressing the needs of vulnerable adolescents who require confidential access to health services and respecting their ability to receive critically important services, such as mental health care and substance abuse treatment?**

### *Pediatric Readiness*

- Recent studies show that improving pediatric readiness in emergency departments could save over 2,100 children's lives annually.
  - a) **What specific steps are you taking to ensure all emergency departments achieve high levels of pediatric readiness?**
  - b) **Will you commit to promulgating a regulation that makes pediatric emergency readiness a condition of participation for hospitals in Medicare and Medicaid to ensure that children receive high quality emergency services in our nation's hospitals?**
- In an emergency, children require specialized care that many hospitals are not adequately prepared to provide. **What are you doing to ensure that HHS strengthens pediatric emergency readiness requirements and provides funding to equip hospitals to properly care for children in critical situations?**

### *Public Health Emergencies*

- **Considering recent public health emergencies, how are you ensuring that children's health needs are prioritized during crises like pandemics or natural disasters?**

### *Child Care*

- The evidence supporting high-quality early childhood investment, including child care, is among the strongest in the social sciences. Investing in children during their most formative years is among the [soundest financial decisions a country can make](#) and ensures that children across the country receive the support they need to thrive. However, in Fiscal Year (FY) 2025, only 1.59% of all federal spending went toward supporting children under 3. Put simply, this means that for every \$100 the federal government spends, it invests just \$1.59 in infants, babies and toddlers. Since FY 2021, the share of federal spending devoted to infants and toddlers has fallen by 20%. **Your budget proposal proposes flat funding for programs like the Child Care and Development Block Grant and Head Start - which would be a decrease in real dollars. Why has your administration not invested more heavily in early childhood**

**programs that have proven outcomes and are good for children, their families, and the professionals who provide them?**