



AMA protests changes to key vaccine advisory committee

The organisation, which represents more than 270 000 physicians and medical students, has been reluctant to criticise the Trump administration's actions, until now. Susan Jaffe reports.

After months of relative quiet while the Trump administration overhauls US health and science agencies, the American Medical Association (AMA) has had enough. When Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr dismissed all 17 members of the independent Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), delegates attending AMA's annual meeting strongly condemned the action within 24 h.

On June 10, more than 700 delegates approved an emergency resolution calling on Kennedy to reverse his decision. It received support from an overwhelming majority, said Jason Goldman, an internal medicine physician and President of the American College of Physicians, which introduced the measure along with 37 other medical societies.

The resolution also required AMA leadership to "immediately" ask the Senate committee overseeing HHS to investigate Kennedy's actions "regarding his administration of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices". And to ensure the AMA keeps the pressure on, the resolution instructs the organisation to "initiate sustained public advocacy in support of the current Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices structure".

After learning of Kennedy's decision, the immediate past Chair of the AMA Board of Trustees and orthopaedic surgeon Michael Suk said he regretted that the AMA did not speak out sooner. "For over 178 years, the AMA has been the voice of American medicine", he told the delegates, as reported by *MedPage Today*. "But let us be honest—we recognise that at times we could have been more forceful, spoken louder. We could have spoken

earlier and more publicly in the defence of science, the patient-physician relationship, and the integrity of our profession." He received a standing ovation.

The ACIP operates in an advisory capacity, but it is required by federal law to establish and review vaccine recommendations, including dosage, dosage interval, and contraindications. Commercial and public health insurers must cover these recommended vaccines at no cost to patients.

Kennedy appointed eight new committee members, including some vaccine sceptics, who will convene their first meeting on June 25. Goldman, an AMA member for more than two decades, suggested that an alternative group of experts could also make vaccine recommendations. "But if they're contrary to the ACIP, then we could end up with a situation where science tells us to do something, but there's no payment, and then patients lose their access to care."

The ACIP resolution is different from the AMA's usual advocacy work said Goldman. "I cannot recall when the AMA had to request the Senate to review the actions of the HHS secretary, and how he handles the aspects of government under his authority", he said. "These are unprecedented times."

In February, the AMA acknowledged that some members "are concerned about proposed policies impacting their practices, patients, and public health", and assured them that it "remains steadfast in our mission to ensure that any reforms support physicians and health care as a whole, strengthen health-care delivery, and improve access to high-quality care".

But in the weeks that followed, the AMA did not publicly comment on Kennedy's qualifications to lead

HHS. It did not join the American Public Health Association and others calling for Kennedy's resignation. It did not publicly support the Doctors for America lawsuit seeking to restore treatment guidelines and other health information physicians use that was removed from government websites. "I would have loved to have their voices join us months ago, but I'm very happy to have them engaged now", said Christine Petrin, a primary care physician and President of the Board of Trustees of Doctors for America, a patient advocacy organisation. However, on May 27, when Kennedy withdrew ACIP recommendations that healthy pregnant women and healthy children receive COVID-19 vaccinations, the AMA sent him a letter strongly criticising him for bypassing the committee and the established process for public review.

Founded in 1847, the AMA has become the largest doctors' organisation in the USA, with a membership of more than 270 000 physicians, medical students, and residents. In 2024, it ranked among the top 10 highest-spending lobbying groups. (AMA officials declined to be interviewed for this report.)

The AMA has a history of "trying to be the organisation for everyone", and avoids the appearance of partisanship, said Mary Ziegler, a Professor of Law at the University of California, Davis School of Law and an expert on the legal history of abortion. "Given that there are doctors who support the Trump administration, or who see themselves as pro-life, I think the AMA tries to sit out a lot of these things for fear of alienating some of its members until it's just impossible to sit it out anymore."

Susan Jaffe

For the **emergency resolution** see <https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/a25-emergency-1001.pdf>

For the **MedPage Today** article see <https://www.medpagetoday.com/meetingcoverage/ama/115993>

For the **AMA letter to Kennedy** see <https://searchlf.ama-assn.org/letter/documentDownload?uri=/unstructured/binary/letter/LETTERS/lfc.zip/2025-5-29-Letter-to-Kennedy-re-COVID-Vaccine-v2-7834.pdf>