

Federal Cuts Threaten Future Directions for Childhood Cancer Research

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According to the American Childhood Cancer Organization, there are around 16,000 children diagnosed with cancer annually in the United States. Before the age of 20, there will be 1 in 285 children diagnosed with cancer. In August, the federal government announced that they would not support a federally funded network of cancer research institutes and according to pbs.org, in September the Trump administration announced targeted federal funding cuts to pediatric brain cancer research.

According to the National Cancer Institute, \$50 million out of the \$7 billion dollars in government funding went into child cancer research in the fiscal year 2024. According to Whitehouse.gov, however, in 2025, the amount doubled to \$100 million to accelerate AI based research. Currently, it is unclear about whether the government will continue funding child cancer research at these levels. "It's tough because childhood cancer is relatively rare, so there's already not much research money going into it because a lot of pharmaceutical companies focus more on adult cancer cases because there's more," Chemistry teacher, Dr. Claudia Bhagat said, "so they do more research because they know they can get enough money after developing a medication."

According to Blood Cancer United, the current administration had announced there were going to be cuts to biomedical research which includes future and current research; this includes blood cancer research funding which impacts children with leukemia and other blood illnesses. According to cureresearch.org, the cuts threaten more effective therapies and especially hit low income families trying to access life-saving therapy. "I haven't heard much about the federal government's plans to cut child cancer research," Sophomore Uwe Azomani said, "but it is quite disappointing that they're putting children's lives at risk and reallocating it towards something that isn't as important."

One organization that is focused on childhood cancer research is St. Jude. St. Jude's Children's Hospital does not charge for cancer treatment. It relies on donations that cover costs which help fund continuing cancer research. Although some of St. Jude's funding comes from government agencies like the National Institutes of Health, 89% of funding comes from private donations like from the American Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities (ALSAC). "If someone wishes to do something, there's always private entities like St. Jude where you could do something good," Bhagat said. "You don't have to pressure the government to do good."

According to cancer.gov, there have been advances to immunotherapy, which uses the patient's own immune system to attack the cancer. The development of CAR-T cell therapy can cure some children with extremely advanced forms of leukemia. The Children's Oncology Group, whose headquarters is in California, led clinical trials that have paved ways for more curative treatments. "I understand the government wants to save money, and that itself is not a bad idea, but of course you always have to think about what consequences that has," Dr. Bhagat said. "Everything has consequences, and I do wish childhood cancer research should be more funded because it's already so underfunded."

Not only does research get affected by governmental spending cuts, but clinical trials which could help patients are affected as well. Clinical trials determine the safety and effectiveness of new treatments, medical devices, and behavioral interventions using human participants. This past summer, Luiza Brandao, St. Andrew's alumna was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. "I think these cuts could potentially cause some research projects to slow down," Brandao said. "If enough funding is lost, it's possible that labs would have to pause their work, but that really depends on the lab and how much they're relying on federal money, so it's hard to say."

According to childrenscancer.org, because of federal disruption, more researchers are turning to non-profit organizations like Children's Cancer Research Fund for help. According to the Mississippi State University website, labs are closing due to the budget cuts to cancer research from federal agencies. Potentially, decades of progress will be lost due to this. "I believe that scientific research funding should be a priority, and that federal funding should not stand in the way of scientific progress," Brandao said. "I'm aware that one of the biggest challenges in research is finding the money to fund it, and that many labs can run into issues when they run out of money before their research is done. It's complicated."

Although the federal cuts to cancer are still ongoing there is still hope that public support could reverse these cuts. In an August survey, conducted as part of the 15th Edition of the American Association for Cancer Research Cancer Progress Report, the majority of the respondents were in support of using federal funding for cancer research. Major non-profit organizations like St. Jude Children's Hospital, Children's Cancer Research Fund, and the Children's Oncology Group provide substantial funding for child cancer research. "I think public awareness could help show that this is an important matter, and create changes for the future," Brandao said. "I also think that if this is something people are worried about, maybe a temporary solution could be to raise money outside of the government, through private research institutions."