

United States officially left the WHO

Distance matters

The United States has officially left the World Health Organization (WHO), ending a year of controversial health reforms.

On 22 January 2026 was the United States' final day as a member of the World Health Organization (WHO) after a year of polemic health policy decisions. On 20 January 2025, Donald Trump signed an executive order to formally initiate the United States' withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO)—a process that concluded on Thursday 22 January 2026, a year after the United Nations was notified.

U.S. President Trump's decision came on the first day of his presidential mandate, his second attempt to leave the international organisation, following a previous effort in 2020. The US government cited the organisation's mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic and other global health crises, its failure to adopt urgently needed reforms, and its inability to demonstrate independence from the inappropriate political influence of WHO member states as reasons for its departure.

Over the last decade, the US has contributed between $160 million and $815 million (€153 million to €780 million) to the WHO every year. The agency's yearly budget is about $2 billion to $3 billion (€1.9 billion to €2.9 billion). Since the announcement last year, the United States' health policy has steadily distanced itself from the international organisation and broader global frameworks.

The return of Donald Trump to the White House in 2025 has accelerated a widening gap between U.S. health policy and the approaches favoured by most other high-income nations. The shift is especially visible in global health cooperation, public health governance, and domestic regulatory strategy, where the U.S. has moved sharply away from multilateralism and evidence driven frameworks embraced elsewhere.

A defining feature of Trump's second term has been a rapid pullback from international health institutions and partnerships.

- Withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO) ended U.S. membership and halted financial contributions to the world's primary health coordination body. This move sharply contrasts with the global trend of strengthening WHO's role after the COVID 19 pandemic.
- Suspension and restructuring of foreign health assistance—including dissolving the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—has disrupted programmes in infectious disease control, maternal health, and vaccine distribution. Other nations have largely increased or stabilised their global health investments, widening the gap further.

- Executive orders redirecting U.S. foreign health policy have signaled a pivot toward unilateralism, while most countries continue to prioritise multilateral cooperation.

Result: the U.S. has shifted from being the world's largest global health donor to a far more inward focused actor, leaving a vacuum that Europe and emerging powers are attempting to fill.

Impact on global health outcomes

The policy shift has had immediate and measurable consequences:

- Funding gaps in global health programmes have widened, affecting HIV/AIDS treatment, malaria control, and maternal child health initiatives that previously relied heavily on U.S. support.
- Reduced U.S. engagement in global surveillance systems has weakened international coordination on emerging infectious diseases.
- Diplomatic strain has emerged as allies attempt to compensate for the U.S. withdrawal from shared health commitments.

Result: the global health landscape is adjusting to a world where the U.S. is no longer the central coordinating force it once was.

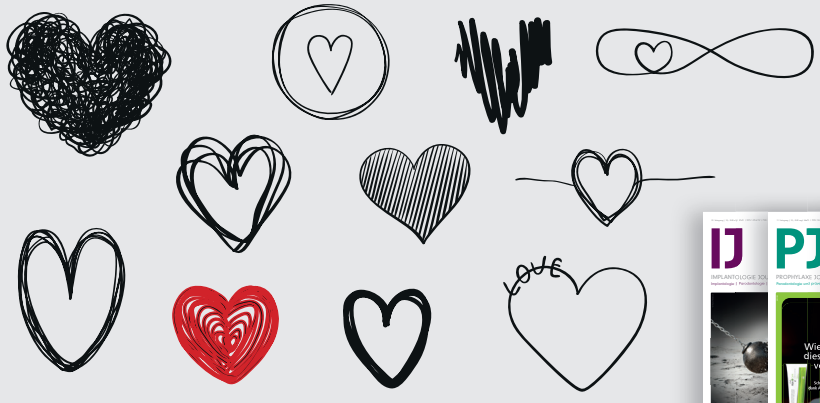
Conclusion

Since Trump's return to the White House, U.S. health policy has moved decisively away from the multilateral, science-aligned approaches favoured by much of the world. The result is a growing strategic and philosophical distance—one that reshapes global health governance, weakens long standing partnerships, and forces other nations to recalibrate their expectations of American leadership.

Sources: Think Global Health, europarl.europa.eu, Frontiers



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