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Anti-Abortion Groups' Secret Weapon; Kennedy Targeted COVID Vax; Research at Risk

— This past week in healthcare investigations

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Welcome to the latest edition of Investigative Roundup, highlighting some of the best investigative reporting on healthcare each week.

Anti-Abortion Advocates Leverage Secret Weapon: Male Partners

One strategy antiabortion advocates may increasingly rely upon as they attempt to block medication abortion from reaching women in ban states is to seek out husbands, boyfriends, and male sex partners of women who had abortions to find cases, according to [the Washington Post](#) [opens in a new tab or window](#).

That was the tactic that led Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton to a unique kind of lawsuit, filed in December, which used information gleaned from an anonymous "biological father" to build a case against a New York physician for allegedly illegally providing abortion pills to a woman living near Dallas, two people familiar with the case told *the Post*.

In February, the largest anti-abortion group in Texas plans to launch a social media campaign on Facebook and X meant to target the male partners of women who had abortions, and recruit them to sue those involved in helping the women end their pregnancies, the article noted.

"The strategy right now is to tell dads that if you're the father of a child victim of an abortion, you have legal rights, there may be a way to hold these people accountable," John Seago, the president of Texas Right to Life, told *the Post*.

Kennedy Asked FDA to Stop COVID Shots Months After Launch

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., whom President Trump tapped to be the next HHS Secretary, petitioned the FDA to revoke the authorization of all COVID vaccines 6 months after they were rolled out to the public, [the New York Times opens in a new tab or window](#) reported.

In May 2021, Kennedy sent a [citizen petition opens in a new tab or window](#) to then-acting FDA Commissioner Janet Woodcock, MD, on behalf of his nonprofit, Children's Health Defense, urging the agency to retract its earlier authorization of the COVID vaccines and to reject any future COVID shot.

At the time of his petition, around half of Americans were getting vaccinated and children were going back to school. Studies projected that the swift vaccination efforts had [saved roughly 140,000 lives opens in a new tab or window](#) in the U.S., the article stated.

In 2021, Kennedy's petition stayed mostly under the public's radar. But now, as [public health experts opens in a new tab or window](#) and [physicians opens in a new tab or window](#) question Trump's choice of HHS nominee, many worry how Kennedy would respond to a potential avian flu pandemic, which could require the launch of its own vaccine.

Still, Kennedy and his allies claim he is not anti-vaccine. "I think he's going to be much less radical than you would think," [Trump said last month opens in a new tab or window](#).

Infectious Disease Research at Risk in Trump's Second Term

If confirmed, Kennedy will also have influence over the NIH, where he already threatened to terminate 600 of the agency's 20,000 staff and move funding out of research for infectious diseases and vaccines, [ProPublica reported opens in a new tab or window](#). The latter is a core responsibility of the NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID).

Even the NIH's strongest supporters agree that some agency reforms are needed. However, a radical makeover that doesn't consider NIAID's essential role in keeping the nation at the leading edge of infectious disease research could threaten the discovery of lifesaving therapies, the article noted.

Because of the backlash against former NIAID director Anthony Fauci, MD, and related COVID policies, Republican lawmakers held multiple congressional hearings to investigate NIAID's work and reduce its budget, while at the same time calling for a radical reorganization.

But such a change would not be without consequences. In total, close to \$5 billion of NIAID's \$6.5 billion budget went to organizations outside the institute, according to an analysis by *ProPublica*. Last year, Duke University and Washington University in St. Louis received the largest grants, totaling \$190 and \$173 million, respectively, for research on HIV, West Nile vaccines, and biodefense, among other issues, the article stated. And a study from Bentley University found that NIH funding was involved in [every new drug approved from 2010 through 2019](#)*opens in a new tab or window*, including treatments for respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), COVID-19 vaccines, and Ebola treatments.

"You never know which part of fundamental research is going to be the lynchpin for curing a disease or defining a disease so you know how to treat it," Nancy Sullivan, PhD, a former senior investigator at NIAID whose research led to the development of the first approved medication for Ebola, told *ProPublica*.



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