

Physicians united: Here's why pulling out of WHO is a big mistake

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What's the news: The AMA joined with three other leading physician organizations to voice disapproval of the Trump administration's move to withdraw the U.S. from the World Health Organization (WHO). They called on Congress to reject the withdrawal and "make every effort to preserve the United States' relationship with this valued global institution."

"The Trump administration's official withdrawal from the World Health Organization puts the health of our country at grave risk," said AMA President Susan R. Bailey, MD, in a joint statement with the leaders of the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Family Physicians and the American College of Physicians.

"As leading medical organizations, representing hundreds of thousands of physicians, we join in strong opposition to this decision, which is a major setback to science, public health, and global coordination efforts needed to defeat COVID-19," Dr. Bailey and the others added. "Now is the time to invest in global health, rather than turn back."

Why it's important: In addition to helping coordinate a global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO plays a vital role in preparing responses to future public health emergencies and past efforts have served to improve global health and avoid preventable deaths.

Withdrawing from the WHO is a "short-sighted decision," the physician leaders said.

"The agency has been on the front lines of every global child health challenge over the last seven decades, successfully eradicating smallpox, vaccinating billions against measles and cutting preventable child deaths by more than half since 1990," they said. "Withdrawing from the WHO puts these investments at risk and leaves the United States without a seat at the table—at a time when our leadership is most desperately needed."

The joint statement builds on a previous response from the AMA made back in May after the

administration announced its intention to withdraw from the WHO.

Withdrawal served “no logical purpose,” made finding a solution to the pandemic more challenging and could have harmful repercussions in worldwide efforts to develop a vaccine and effective COVID-19 treatments, then-AMA President Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA, said at the time.

Defeating COVID-19 “requires the entire world working together,” Dr. Harris added.

In April, Dr. Harris said withdrawing from the WHO would be “a dangerous step in the wrong direction, and noted that “fighting a global pandemic requires international cooperation “

“Cutting funding to the WHO—rather than focusing on solutions—is a dangerous move at a precarious moment for the world,” she added

The message regarding the need for a unified international effort was echoed in the statement from the physician leaders.

"As our nation and the rest of the world face a global health pandemic, a worldwide, coordinated response is more vital than ever," they said. "This dangerous withdrawal not only impacts the global response against COVID-19, but also undermines efforts to address other major public health threats."

Learn more: Stay current on the AMA's COVID-19 advocacy efforts and track the pandemic with the AMA's COVID-19 resource center, which offers resources from JAMA Network™, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the WHO.

The defense of the WHO is consistent with the AMA's efforts to promote evidence-based science and to combat misinformation.

To that end, the AMA has called on elected officials to affirm science, evidence and facts in their words and actions; and called on the media to be vigilant in communicating factual information from credible sources and to challenge those who trade in misinformation.

Read how the AMA defends science in a time of fear and uncertainty.

Throughout the pandemic, the AMA has partnered with other organizations to further the penetration of its advocacy efforts and messages.

The AMA recently partnered with the American Hospital Association and the American Nurses Association to call on the American public to protect themselves, their neighbors and families by continuing to wear masks, practice physical distancing, and to wash their hands frequently.