



By: *Sharmila Devi*

Make America Healthy Again movement suffers divisions over core issues



Has the Make America Healthy Again movement reached its peak influence? Although a third of Americans identify as MAHA supporters, a recent poll shows sharp **disagreement** over what it actually stands for, such as vaccine scepticism, banning chemicals or eliminating fluoride from water.

Many MAHA activists are still furious about the Trump administration's **executive order** in February to boost the production of the weedkiller glyphosate, which has been linked to cancer. MAHA's cheerleader, Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr, publicly backed the move.

Behind the scenes, however, he is trying to rewrite the rules for membership of a key vaccine advisory panel. A judge last month ruled that his choices for the panel were unqualified, putting a major obstacle before his drive to reshape US vaccine policy.

Deep cuts to science and health

Deep cuts to science and health still remain a cornerstone of the US government, according to its **budget request** to Congress for the fiscal year 2027 and released last week.

Unsurprisingly, given the billions spent on the Iran war, defence spending could rise to its highest level in decades, up by 42% to \$1.5 trillion and \$445 billion higher than in 2026.

Spending on health would be cut by more than 12%, and there would even be a ban on using federal funds for subscriptions and publishing fees for some academic journals.

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But, in January, **Congress** refused to pass many of Trump's proposed cuts to federal science funding for fiscal year 2026, such as eliminating funds for family planning and

reproductive health.

Trump's latest budget proposal is seen as a starting point for Congressional negotiations that could last until the start of the 2027 fiscal year on 1 October or even beyond because of Congressional elections on 3 November.

It includes plans for a new agency devoted to chronic diseases called the Administration for a Healthy America, which Congress also refused to fund in the last budget request, and planning for it has been shrouded in secrecy.

A fracturing within MAHA

Just as the Iran war has exposed cracks and divisions within Trump's base, Make America Great Again, or MAGA, with many leading voices opposing his military adventures, there may be a similar fracturing within MAHA as it suffers an identity crisis.

The MAHA movement "is struggling to find its footing," said Politico when it published a poll last week diving into what **MAHA** supporters actually believe in. Despite RFK Jr's drive against vaccines, the issue did not appear in the top six core issues of MAHA supporters.

Far more important to them were policies such as removing ultra-processed foods from American diets, removing artificial dyes from foods, and limiting pesticide use.

The White House has told the health secretary to avoid talking about vaccines and focus instead on food and fitness as the Republicans gear up for the midterms while the Democrats seek to capitalise on rifts within the Trump administration over glyphosate production, according to Politico.

Last May, RFK Jr blamed glyphosate for health problems in the first MAHA report

The weed-killing chemical, known as Roundup, can enter the body through grains and

legumes. It was manufactured by the company Monsanto, which was acquired by the German conglomerate Bayer in 2018, and it has faced around 20,000 claims over alleged harm.

In February, it agreed to pay \$7.25 billion in a class-action lawsuit that alleged glyphosate exposure played a role in causing non-Hodgkin lymphoma, a form of cancer.

Last May, RFK Jr blamed glyphosate for health problems in the first MAHA report. Soon after, Bayer executives had a series of meetings at the White House, saying the uncertainty of a possible ban meant it might have to leave the US market and take with it the sole US domestic production of phosphorus, which is used in weapons, among other applications.

Then came Trump's executive order to boost glyphosate production, which RFK Jr chose to back amid a MAHA backlash.

Health in the upcoming midterms

Casey Means, who has leapfrogged from being a wellness influence to becoming Trump's choice as the next US surgeon-general, was asked about the weed killer during a **Senate hearing** and said: "We must, as a country, move away from using toxic inputs in our food supply, and we must study these chemicals more to understand their effects." She has yet to be confirmed.



We must, as a country, move away from using toxic inputs

in our food supply - Casey Means

The US still suffers from chaos in other leading health institutions. The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention has no permanent chief, and its acting director is Jay Bhattacharya, who heads the National Institutes of Health.

Health is set to feature highly in the list of concerns of American voters in the midterms. Some candidates, scientists and volunteers this week launched the People's Health Platform to push for policies such as healthcare for all and protecting and expanding sexual, reproductive and gender-affirming healthcare.

"We need public health experts in Congress who can deliver and fight back against quacks like RFK Jr dismantling the systems that protect our health and our democracy," Nina Schwalbe, who is running to represent New York's 12th Congressional District, told The Guardian.