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Comptroller General  
of the United States

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June 3, 2026

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, D.C. 20201

### Priority Open Recommendations: Department of Health and Human Services

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

The purpose of this letter is to call your personal attention to two areas where open recommendations to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) should be given high priority.

In January 2026, we reported that, on a government-wide basis, 77 percent of our recommendations made 5 years ago were implemented.<sup>1</sup> HHS's recommendation implementation rate was about 70 percent. As of May 2026, HHS had 436 open recommendations, including 38 priority recommendations.<sup>2</sup> Since our May 2025 letter, HHS implemented four priority recommendations.<sup>3</sup> Fully implementing the remaining open priority recommendations could significantly improve HHS's operations.

We are highlighting the following areas that warrant your timely and focused attention:

- **Strengthen Medicare and Medicaid program integrity and oversight.** Together, the Medicaid and Medicare programs accounted for over \$1.6 trillion in federal spending and over \$95 billion in improper payments in fiscal year 2025. To help ensure efficient use of federal resources, we recommended that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) account for Medicaid payments made to [offset costs for services provided to](#) uninsured or low-income individuals when making Medicare payments to individual hospitals. In addition, we found weaknesses in how CMS targets its oversight of state-reported Medicaid expenditures. For example, CMS devoted similar levels of staff resources to review expenditures despite differing levels of risk across states. We recommended that

<sup>1</sup>GAO, *Performance and Accountability Report, Fiscal Year 2025*, [GAO-26-900644](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 29, 2026).

<sup>2</sup>GAO considers a recommendation to be a priority if when implemented, it may significantly improve government operations, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or making progress toward addressing a high-risk or duplication issue.

<sup>3</sup>GAO, *Priority Open Recommendations: Department of Health and Human Services*, [GAO-25-108032](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 2, 2025). In this letter, we identified 35 priority recommendations. Since then, in addition to the four that were implemented, we added seven new priority recommendations.

CMS complete a [national risk assessment](#) to assure that its oversight resources are adequate and allocated based on areas of highest risk. Addressing these recommendations would help ensure the efficient and effective use of federal resources.

- **Improve public health program oversight and coordination.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) awards money to states and jurisdictions to help them build and sustain public health preparedness and response capabilities. However, we found that CDC does not collect information on jurisdictions' ability to meet preparedness capabilities, nor any gaps in their ability to do so. We recommended that CDC [collect and analyze this information](#), which would help officials understand how prepared jurisdictions are to respond to public health emergencies.

These areas—[Medicare](#) and [Medicaid](#) program integrity and oversight and [public health program oversight and coordination](#)— are also included on GAO's [High Risk List](#).<sup>4</sup> Several other government-wide high-risk areas have direct implications for HHS and its operations, including [ensuring the cybersecurity of the nation](#). We also identified actions HHS should take to reduce fragmentation, overlap, and duplication. For example, we reported that HHS could better manage fragmentation in its [department-wide after-action programs](#) to identify and resolve recurring emergency response challenges. More information on our [Duplication and Cost Savings](#) work can be found on the GAO website.

A comprehensive list of open recommendations, including new priority recommendations, and information about their status can be found on the GAO website at [Recommendations Database | U.S. GAO](#). Copies of this letter are being sent to the appropriate congressional committees.<sup>5</sup> This letter will also be available at [Priority Recommendations | U.S. GAO](#).

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss how to address our open recommendations, as we pursue the shared goal of working to increase efficiency and effectiveness of government programs and spending. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Jessica Farb at [FarbJ@gao.gov](mailto:FarbJ@gao.gov). Contact points for our offices of Congressional Relations and Media Relations may be found on the last page of this letter. Thank you for your personal attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,

//SIGNED//

Orice Williams Brown  
Acting Comptroller General of the United States

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<sup>4</sup>This list identifies government operations with greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, [GAO-25-107743](#) (Washington, D.C.: February 25, 2025).

<sup>5</sup>We also help Congress identify congressional oversight actions that can help agencies implement priority recommendations, such as incorporating them into legislation. James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263, § 7211(a)(2), 136 Stat. 2395, 3668 (2022) (codified at 31 U.S.C. § 719 note). Congress can also use its budget, appropriations, and oversight processes to incentivize executive branch agencies to act on our recommendations and monitor their progress. For example, Congress can hold hearings focused on agencies' progress in implementing priority recommendations, withhold funds when appropriate, or take other actions to provide incentives for agencies to act.

cc: Matt Buckham, Chief of Staff, Department of Health and Human Services  
Alex J. Adams, Acting Assistant Secretary for the Administration for Children and Families  
Jay Bhattacharya, Acting Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Mehmet Oz, Administrator, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services  
Kyle Diamantas, Acting Commissioner, Food and Drug Administration  
Thomas J. Engels, Administrator, Health Resources and Services Administration