

# THE BALTIMORE BANNER

## **Have a disease and hoping for a cure? That's now at risk with federal cuts, UMB scientists say**

[Meredith Cohn](#)

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Dr. Mark T. Gladwin, pictured here at the UMB's BioPark in Baltimore in January, is the dean of the University of Maryland School of Medicine who said this week that federal funding cuts threatens work at the university to treat and cure maladies. (Jerry Jackson/The Baltimore Banner)

### **Tens of millions of dollars in grant funding expected to be cut, university officials say.**

They've investigated blood tests to find cancer early and treat it with the best drugs. They've looked at new obesity drugs to curb cocaine addiction. They've developed medications aimed at addressing chronic pain and prevent norovirus symptoms that have plagued some cruise ships.

These are some of the scientists at the University of Maryland, Baltimore whose projects have been canceled, stalled or put under threat by cuts at the National Institutes of Health under the Trump administration.

The researchers heading up this work in labs or clinics held an online news conference this week to make sure the public understood what is at stake in Maryland and around the country.

Federal officials say they are looking to reduce government spending and stem research that doesn't align with Trump's directives. As a result, they have canceled millions in grants to Maryland and are slowing the process for new funding.

University scientists say that is hampering new treatments and cures. It's also jeopardizing jobs that fuel the local economy now and in the future.

Campus leaders, for example, are reducing spots in the medical school and in labs for young researchers. At the University of Maryland School of Medicine, there are plans to reduce the number of doctoral students admitted by almost half, to 30 from

Dramatic funding cuts to universities now will likely be felt for a generation or longer in the state and around the country, said Dr. Mark Gladwin, dean of the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

"We're seeing grants not being reviewed or not being awarded," he said at the Thursday news conference. "NIH has awarded \$2.8 billion less in funding than at the same time last year. We're seeing only 30% of grants renewed. The wave of underfunding is hitting us."

Gladwin was joined by several top researchers from the medical school and other university schools of dentistry, nursing and pharmacy, as well as centers that focus on vaccine development, infectious disease prevention, addiction treatment, cancer cures and pain management.

They outlined what they do with NIH grants, from the basic science that underpins new drugs to the clinical trials that give patients often with little hope an opportunity to try out an experimental therapy.

University officials said recently that NIH has terminated at least a dozen grants with a value of \$5.87 million this year, and an anticipated funding loss of \$11.6 million over the next few years. In most cases, federal authorities said cancellations to grants were because they involved gender identity issues or promoted diversity, equity and inclusion, subjects now verboten in the Trump administration.

Also at risk is so-called indirect funding. The university has said it stands to lose nearly \$50 million a year from proposed cuts that go to the university for overhead and to maintain lab and other space the scientists say is essential to continue their work.

Maryland Attorney General Anthony Brown said Friday that the state was joining 16 other states in a lawsuit against the Trump administration for what the coalition said was an unlawful and “politically motivated” attempt to disrupt NIH grant funding with intentional delays, as well as termination of hundreds of already-issued grants. Brown joined a separate coalition last month suing over cuts the indirect funding.

The university is seeking to reverse canceled grants through an administrative appeals process. One of those studies involves a study to address chronic pain led by Dr. Man-Kyo Chung, a professor of pain and neural sciences in Maryland’s School of Dentistry.

Chung believes a keyword search conducted by Trump administration officials might have led to its label as a DEI project. The project is looking at differences in pain between biological sexes in animals.

Other work at risk started decades ago as an effort to curb dangerous diarrheal diseases in developing countries. It also aims now to help address more common viruses that make Americans sick too.

Federal funding slated for cuts has been critical in helping developing countries care for poor children, areas of study which have not been a money maker or a big focus for pharmaceutical companies, said Dr. Wilbur Chen, a professor of medicine in the school of medicine’s Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health.

“It’s super important to global health,” he said.

Chen said past work made the center well-equipped to develop and test treatments and vaccines against COVID-19 during the pandemic. And it’s working now on treatments and vaccines for other foodborne and infectious diseases that [routinely plague the country](#).

It, too, “is all heavily reliant on government funding,” he said.

Gladwin, who also researches treatments for sickle cell disease, said a drop in funding is affecting more than just new therapies. He said academic research institutions are often the economic drivers in their communities that could now sputter.

Gladwin said research funding, which amounts to half the medical school budget, subsidizes the teaching mission. In addition to fewer doctoral students, Gladwin said, the school will accept fewer medical students, potentially exacerbating a shortage of health care providers.

Gladwin said he hoped there is still time to reverse course and save the critical federal investment in research, which until now has been a “great American success story.”



**Meredith Cohn is a health and medicine reporter for The Baltimore Banner, covering the latest research, public health developments and other news. She has been covering the beat in Baltimore for more than two decades.**