

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery  
Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Subcommittee on Health Hearing: “Are CDC's Priorities  
Restoring Public Trust and Improving the Health of the  
American People?”  
July 23, 2024**

**OPENING**

Thank you, Vice Chair Bucshon.

Good morning and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

For decades, America enjoyed its status of having one of the pre-eminent public health infrastructures in the world.

Federal agencies conducted cutting edge research and facilitated private sector efforts to advance science and keep our citizens safe.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic struck.

**MISSION CREEP / MISPLACED PRIORITIES**

The CDC was established to assist states and localities in controlling infectious disease outbreaks.

COVID-19 should have been the agency’s moment to shine.

Unfortunately, on almost every level—the CDC fell flat.

From egregious flaws in testing...

...confusing—and, at times, blatantly misleading—communication mishaps, and one-size-fits-all guidance and mandates ...

...the CDC failed at its primary job of helping states and localities detect, respond to, and control a disease outbreak.

These failures beg the question ... why did the CDC fail to execute its principal mission at the time of most need?

Was it because the agency's focus has strayed too far from its core mission?

Is the agency spread too thin across competing and misguided priorities...

...and how do we refocus the agency to most effectively meet the needs of the American people?

It is notable that between fiscal years 2013 and 2014, non-communicable disease funding increased by 150 percent.

Over the same time period, there have been consistent increases in the rates of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension.

There is clearly a disconnect here—Congress has a responsibility to understand what the return on that investment has been.

As the Committee responsible for overseeing the CDC, we must question the effectiveness of these programs, understand who at CDC is responsible for evaluating these programs, and whether these investments would be better directed elsewhere.

## **BROKEN PUBLIC TRUST**

The unfortunate truth is that Americans have lost faith in our public health agencies—particularly in the CDC.

The agency's many failures rightfully led people to question whether the guidance being released was actually grounded in science, reason, or even common sense.

As our Committee helped to uncover, the six-foot social distancing rule “just kind of appeared,” as Dr. Fauci put it.

More recently, Dr. Fauci attributed the decision to mandate the six-foot social distancing rule entirely to CDC.

And yet the CDC has failed to explain how it was coming to its conclusions during that time, who was making these decisions, why it was issuing such guidance, and how that guidance would keep people safe.

The CDC failed to explain how our understanding of the science evolved and changed over time.

And the CDC failed to offer any kind of nuance as to who was vulnerable and who wasn't.

These failures led to massive learning loss for our children that set them decades behind, a mental health crisis, and economic hardship.

## **RESTORING PUBLIC TRUST**

We need the CDC to be successful and credible for the health and future of our nation—but there is a lot of work that needs to be done to restore people’s trust.

Late last year, we held a hearing with the Director of the CDC, Dr. Cohen. At that hearing we heard updates on the CDC-wide “Moving Forward” initiative.

We likely have differing opinions on how productive and effective that initiative has been and the outcomes it has generated.

However, I think that initiative does show that we can all agree that work must be done to rebuild public trust in the CDC and our public health institutions.

That work will only be successful if the CDC’s leadership and your Centers and Offices are truly committed to reform... and are willing to show you can make the hard decisions that need to be made.

This means admitting where inefficiencies exist and taking accountability for mistakes.

It means being honest about what you know and do not know, and when you know it.

It means making honest attempts to streamline and—perhaps in some cases—eliminate programs that are no longer working for the American people.

And it means showing the American people you value their judgment, their individual perspectives, and that you are committed to regaining their trust.

My hope is that we can work together to achieve this, starting with today's conversation.

Thank you, and I yield back.