

Several hundred NIH employees sign a letter of protest to the agency's director

Authors of the 'Bethesda Declaration' ask NIH head Jay Bhattacharya to 'listen to us'



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By **Anil Oza** June 9, 2025

Sharon Begley Science Reporting Fellow

Nearly five years ago, Jay Bhattacharya, then a Stanford professor, was part of a trio that published an open letter calling for less stringent public health protections against the Covid pandemic. They called it the Great Barrington Declaration, and its opposition to vaccine mandates and school closings thrust him into the public eye. He became a frequent commentator on the pandemic, an adviser to conservative lawmakers, and eventually the leader of the world's largest public funder of biomedical research.

Now, several hundred of his employees at the National Institutes of Health have written their own declaration to rebuke many of the agency's actions over the course of President Trump's second term. Called the "Bethesda Declaration," referencing the location of the agency's Maryland headquarters, it expresses concern over the cancellation of research on health disparities, climate change, and LGBTQ+ people; the proposed cut to funding for research indirect costs; and the firing of "essential" NIH employees, among other moves.

"We modeled this after the Great Barrington declaration because we want Jay Bhattacharya to see himself in this letter. He's called for academic freedom and a culture of dissent. If he's the person that he claims to be, I think he has to listen to us, and so I hope

he's the person he claims to be, and that we can work together to be thoughtful about creating policies that achieve the goal of making America healthy while not imposing risks on our research participants and the public," said Jenna Norton, a program officer at the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, who signed onto the letter.