



MEMORANDUM

TO: Sirona Strategies Clients

DATE: November 15, 2024

RE: Background on Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. Nominee for Secretary of HHS

On November 14, President-Elect Trump announced the appointment of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. to serve as the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Kennedy previously served as President and co-founder of the Waterkeeper Alliance, an environmental organization, as well as Senior Attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and Chairman of the Children's Health Defense. Kennedy has been a strong advocate for environmental protection, public health, and corporate accountability.

This memo provides an overview of Kennedy and his health care priorities.

Background

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. earned his bachelor's degree in American history and literature from Harvard University, JD from the University of Virginia School of Law, and a Master of Laws from Pace University. He began his career as [assistant district attorney](#) for the Southern District of New York, where he worked on cases related to environmental law and organized crime. In the mid-1980s, he joined two nonprofits focused on environmental protection: [Hudson Riverkeeper](#) and the [Natural Resources Defense Council \(NRDC\)](#). At NRDC, Kennedy served as a senior attorney and worked on campaigns targeting industrial pollution, water protection, and climate change. At Hudson Riverkeeper, a nonprofit organization focused on protecting the Hudson River in New York, he helped lead efforts to clean up pollution in the river and hold industries accountable for environmental violations.

In 1986, Kennedy [became an adjunct professor](#) of environmental law at Pace University School of Law. In 1987, he [founded](#) Pace's Environmental Litigation Clinic, where he held the positions of supervising attorney and co-director until 2017. He [founded](#) the nonprofit environmental group Waterkeeper Alliance in 1999, serving as the president of its board until 2020. In 2011, Kennedy [co-founded](#) the Children's Health Defense, an organization known for its advocacy on vaccine safety, environmental health, and the prevention of environmental toxins. Kennedy's views on vaccines, particularly his opposition to vaccine mandates and concerns about vaccine ingredients, have drawn both significant support and criticism, with some of his claims regarded as controversial and scientifically disputed or unfounded.

Priorities

RFK Jr.'s key health policy priorities include addressing chronic disease, reforming regulatory agencies, and enhancing domestic medical supply chains. It is anticipated that RFK Jr. will work towards implementing structural changes within the existing federal health agencies. His priorities are expected to be centered around his [Make America Healthy Again \(MAHA\)](#) plan.

Chronic Disease Prevention and Nutrition

Kennedy is expected to focus on chronic disease prevention, specifically working towards addressing increasing rates of diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular disease in the U.S. This focus is expected to include an HHS investigation of drivers of chronic illness such as environmental factors, toxins, and dietary influences. Kennedy has routinely shared his concern on the impact of processed foods, chemical exposure, and over reliance on pharmaceuticals, pushing for stricter regulatory standards and healthier food policies. Since he has criticized federal agencies for their lack of transparency, it is also possible that his agenda may include initiatives to overhaul regulatory practices and refocus on reducing the influence of the pharmaceutical industry. Dietary guidelines may be reevaluated, especially regarding processed foods and environmental toxins. Lastly, he is expected to focus on vaccine safety and efficacy.

Expanding US Manufacturing of Pharmaceuticals

Kennedy has shared his concern around America's dependence on foreign pharmaceutical supply chains, particularly from China. It is anticipated that he will focus on strengthening domestic production capabilities and promoting the procurement of pharmaceutical resources directly within the United States. Expanding U.S. manufacturing for drugs and medical devices will likely be a priority as well.

Conclusion

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s nomination may face a challenging Senate confirmation process, as some Republicans remain undecided about backing his candidacy. If confirmed, Kennedy will likely focus on implementing his "Make America Healthy Again" plan to combat the causes of chronic disease and childhood illness. He will focus on agencies like the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). He will need to be complemented by a CMS Administrator with strong knowledge of the agency's health care programs.