

HHS changes the U.S. health IT office's name, and its purview

The changes, reversing a reorganization under Biden, focus the office on new policy priorities

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The Trump administration is changing the name of the federal health IT office back to the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC). The Tuesday announcement also reverts the organization of the office to focus on external IT coordination, instead of also overseeing Health and Human Services' internal use of technology.

In 2024, the Biden administration had appended Assistant Secretary for Technology Policy (ASTP) to the office's title, as well as moved HHS' chief technology officer, chief data officer, and chief AI officer roles to ONC's purview. The new announcement reverses that change, putting those offices and some cybersecurity functions back under the office of the chief information officer.

The changes streamline ONC's purview and focuses it on the administration's priorities of getting patients their health data and decreasing the friction in sharing health records.

Lucia Savage, who worked in ONC as the chief privacy officer for two years at the end of the Obama administration, told STAT that this change seems "100%" consistent with what the administration wants ONC to do, "which is really focus on this core problem of interoperability, the health tech ecosystem, people getting their own data. All those things are about ONC's original remit, which is interoperability in the health system writ large, not in HHS agencies."

Former national coordinator Don Rucker, who held the post for Trump's first presidency, told STAT that the reorganization was a rational move

and brings clarity to the office's mission, which is coordinating national health information technology. Under the ASTP configuration, the office became split with technology assessment and HHS operations added to its plate, he said.

Thomas Keane, the current national coordinator, said in a press release that the changes mean "ONC can focus even more on standards, certification, and policy, while our close partnership with OCIO ensures that the infrastructure and cybersecurity foundation are in place to support the health care system of tomorrow." The chief information officer for HHS is Clark Minor, a former longtime Palantir employee.

However, even as HHS emphasized ONC's renewed focus on policy, the reorganization seems to de-prioritize policy, renaming ONC's Office of Policy as the Office of Programs and Implementation.

When asked if the restructuring affects ONC's personnel or budget, an ASTP spokesperson told STAT by email that, "No policy staff are being moved and our budget isn't changing."

Savage brought up the recent kerfuffles prompted by electronic health records system vendor Epic's lawsuit against health data network Health Gorilla over allegedly improperly sharing patient records. Both Epic and Health Gorilla have sent letters to national coordinator Keane, asking for clarity and reforms. "If a focus gives ONC the ability to serve more firmly, make sure that the stakeholders in the health care ecosystem writ large understand what federal policy is and what will be enforced, that's a good thing," she said. "Let's not water down their attention span."