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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

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<http://help.senate.gov>

April 5, 2018

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

I am outraged by the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) decision to remove critical information related to breast cancer from the website for the Office of Women's Health (OWH). There is no justification for the federal health department to make it harder for women to access critical information that may help them identify or treat breast cancer. I strongly urge you to republish this critical information, and I demand an explanation of the decision to make these resources unavailable.

A recent report by the Sunlight Foundation found substantial portions of the "Breast Cancer" section of the OWH website have been removed or significantly altered.¹ The "Breast Cancer" page previously contained separate informational pages on breast cancer symptoms, screening and diagnosis, risk factors and prevention, treatment, and federal government action on breast cancer. All of those pages and Spanish language resources have been taken down. OWH's "A-Z Health Topics" page no longer lists "Breast cancer" or "Early-stage breast cancer treatment" as available topics. The website no longer notifies visitors that the Affordable Care Act (ACA) requires insurers to cover mammograms, among other preventive services for women, at no cost. The website also no longer provides information about the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) program that provides breast and cervical cancer screening and diagnostic services to low-income, uninsured, and underserved women.

An HHS spokesperson said the pages were removed "because content was not mobile-friendly and very rarely used," and visitors seeking information on breast cancer could visit WomensHealth.gov/cancer.² That website does not, however, provide information about breast cancer. According to the Sunlight Foundation report, none of the removed information is available elsewhere on the OWH site. HHS also took no steps to notify the public that these resources would no longer be available on the OWH website or to inform them of other federal government websites that offer information on breast cancer.

¹ <http://sunlightfoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/AAR-4-OWH-Breast-Cancer-180329.pdf>

² <https://thinkprogress.org/health-department-removes-breast-cancer-obamacare-information-womens-health-a75d9c1eb5db/>

It is difficult to understand how an office dedicated to women's health could possibly justify removing resources about the most common cancer in women of all races and ethnicities.³ Each year, hundreds of thousands of women are diagnosed with breast cancer; in 2017 alone, over 300,000 women were diagnosed with breast cancer and over 40,000 were killed by the disease.⁴ The federal government should be focused on providing more information to assist women in identifying and treating the disease, rather than efforts to remove public health resources.

The Trump Administration has shown time and time again that it does not respect women's ability to make informed health care decisions for themselves, and it is clear that there is no end to the measures this Administration is willing to take to undermine women's health. To help me understand why HHS decided information about breast cancer need no longer be available, please answer the following questions by no later than April 19, 2018:

1. Why did HHS remove breast cancer resources from the OWH website? How did the Department determine which information to remove?
2. How does HHS determine that a website is "very rarely used"? What usage data does HHS rely on to reach that conclusion?
3. Does HHS plan to publish new breast cancer resources on the OWH website in the future? If so, when? And how will the new resources differ from what was previously available?
4. Does HHS plan to remove breast cancer resources from other HHS websites?
5. Does HHS plan to remove further information from the OWH website? If so, what information and when?

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, or would like to further discuss compliance with this request, please contact Elizabeth Letter or Laurel Sakai with my HELP Committee Staff at 202-224-0767.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

cc: The Honorable Lamar Alexander, United States Senator
Chairman, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/statistics/index.htm>

⁴ <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/breast-cancer-facts-and-figures/breast-cancer-facts-and-figures-2017-2018.pdf>