

Foreword by Dr. Parikh, MD, FASN

Kidney diseases kill more Americans every year than most cancers—yet it receives only a fraction of the research investment. More than 37 million people in the United States live with kidney diseases, and an additional 86 million are at risk due to diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. Each year, over 100,000 Americans progress to kidney failure, requiring dialysis or transplantation to survive. For too many, those treatments fall short: nearly 60 percent of patients who begin dialysis will die within five years.

The economic burden is equally profound. Through Medicare, American taxpayers spend more than \$150 billion annually on care for kidney diseases, representing nearly two percent of the federal budget. Dialysis and transplantation alone account for approximately \$50 billion each year (1). Beyond these federal expenditures, the hidden costs to families and communities are immense: loss of income, lost productivity, reliance on disability benefits, and the daily sacrifices made by caregivers.

Kidney diseases are a silent epidemic that spares no group. Unlike heart disease or stroke, it offers few warning signs; nine out of 10 people with kidney diseases are unaware of their condition until it's often too late. It affects premature infants, as well as older adults, coal miners, farmers, and office workers in major cities. While personal wealth cannot shield individuals from genetic forms of kidney diseases, poverty, poor nutrition, and limited access to preventive care accelerate its impact. Kidney diseases worsen existing health inequities and threaten the stability of families and communities across the nation.

During his first term, President Donald J. Trump signed the Executive Order on Advancing American Kidney Health (2). Since this landmark action, the federal government has started to prioritize and improve kidney health through policy and law. Examples include the 2024 ESRD (End Stage Renal Disease) Quality Incentive Program from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the Health Resources and Services Administration's Organ Transplantation Affinity Group and Modernization Initiatives, and several new laws passed by Congress, including most recently the Securing the US Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network Act [Public Law 118-14] (3).

These important steps may help, but a century-long underinvestment in kidney research has stalled our search for breakthroughs (4). Today, the United States spends roughly \$19 per patient per year on kidney research — a fraction of the per-patient investments made in cancer (5). This imbalance has stalled progress, leaving dialysis as the default therapy for kidney failure despite its debilitating impact and poor survival outcomes.

The Transforming Kidney Health Research (TKHR) Panel convened in 2024 to address this urgent gap. Representing patients, clinicians, researchers, and policy experts, the Panel has developed a comprehensive roadmap for the future of kidney health research. This report outlines that roadmap — a coordinated, evidence-based plan to accelerate the discovery of earlier diagnostics, more effective treatments, and ultimately, cures. The panel's recommendations will transform the lives of millions of Americans living with kidney diseases, improve the outlook for people living with kidney failure, and help address concerns about federal spending, especially the long-term viability of the Medicare program.

The choice before the nation is clear. Strategic investment in kidney research offers the opportunity to save lives, reduce disparities, strengthen the workforce, and safeguard the nation's fiscal health. The path forward is well defined. What is needed now is the resolve to act.



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