

Biden set to name new CDC director

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A former Obama administration official with extensive experience in federal and state health services could be the next leader of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Former North Carolina Health Secretary Dr. Mandy Cohen is the likely pick, according to sources with knowledge of the plan, the Washington Post reported.

Cohen would come with credentials that may help her lead the beleaguered agency, criticized for its response to the pandemic.

Some [public health experts](#) welcomed the news of her potential appointment.

Cohen can "take the wonky stuff and make it work on the ground," said Anne Zink, Alaska's chief medical officer and president of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.

Meanwhile, Stanford professor of medicine Jay Bhattacharya, who has criticized the CDC in the past, called her selection "maybe a hopeful sign" in a tweet, the Post reported.

A formal announcement is expected from President Biden later this month.

Cohen would replace Dr. Rochelle Walensky, who is stepping down at the end of the month.

While Walensky was an infectious disease expert who had not previously worked in government leadership, Cohen was previously a senior official at the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and North Carolina's health secretary for nearly five years.

In that job, she helped roll out the state's Medicaid managed care program, the Post reported.

Cohen was also responsible for the state's 2020 and 2021 COVID-19

response, and has said that North Carolina's approach could be emulated by other [government agencies](#) to build public confidence.

"Trust was not built at the national level, but I know trust was built in North Carolina," Cohen said in a speech last month, highlighting the use of data dashboards and regular news conferences, the Post reported.

Neither the White House nor Cohen commented on the potential appointment.

The job would be a challenging one, including reforming the 13,000-person agency so that it can be more responsive to the next pandemic and communicating public health threats to a divided America.

"A tall order for even the most talented of leaders," Dr. Tom Inglesby, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, who co-wrote a report on how to improve the CDC's operations and pandemic response, told the Post.

Congressional action will be required for some issues the CDC could pursue, including greater authority to mandate state data reporting to the agency.

Cohen was educated at Yale and Harvard as an internal medicine physician.

Her past work also includes working on HIV issues in South Africa and at the Department of Veterans Affairs on women's health. She also volunteered on the Healthcare.gov repair effort during the Obama years.

Cohen currently is a health care executive for Aledade, focusing on improving primary care health practices, the Post reported.

More information: The Brookings Institution has more on [CDC reforms](#).

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