

Sent: Tuesday, August 07, 2018 4:28 PM

Subject: In Memoriam: Secretary Margaret Heckler

Dear Colleagues,

It was with great sadness that we learned yesterday of the death of Margaret Heckler, former Secretary of Health and Human Services. Secretary Heckler lived a full life in devotion to serving her country.

Over 30 years ago, under her leadership, HHS launched a project that laid the foundation for improving the health of millions of Americans. In 1985, Heckler created the Task Force on Black and Minority Health, charging it with researching and analyzing “the impact of a broad range of behavioral, societal and healthcare issues on the current departmental program areas.” The goal was a full, inclusive picture of our nation’s health.

The Heckler Report revealed a large “disparity in the burden of death and illness experience” across the American people, especially among black, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian populations. In the opening pages of the report, Secretary Heckler expressed a principle that has lasted at HHS to this day. The stubborn disparities in American health, she said, were “an affront both to our ideals and to the ongoing genius of American medicine.” In response to the report’s findings, HHS established the Office of Minority Health in 1987.

In 1984, Secretary Heckler called a press conference to highlight the emergence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, publicly launching a battle that continues to this day. She was joined at the press conference by Dr. Robert Gallo, one of the discoverers of HIV/AIDS and a close research partner of our current CDC director, Dr. Robert Redfield.

Prior to her time at HHS, Heckler served eight terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, representing the former 10th congressional district in southeastern Massachusetts. Following her time at HHS, she served as U.S. Ambassador to Ireland from 1985 to 1989.

Secretary Heckler’s boldness in taking on health disparities and HIV/AIDS is a proud legacy of our department. I hope everyone at HHS and all Americans remain committed to the ideals she espoused, including creating a healthier America for everyone.

Alex M. Azar II

Secretary of Health and Human Services