

# Dr. Amy Acton launches Democratic campaign for Ohio governor in 2026

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COLUMBUS, Ohio—Dr. Amy Acton, who became a statewide celebrity of sorts as state health director during the early days of the coronavirus crisis, filed paperwork Tuesday to run for Ohio governor in 2026.

Acton, who [has been hinting at such a run since last summer](#), is the first Democrat to launch a 2026 gubernatorial campaign. Few expect her to be the only candidate from her party to run, though their party's eventual nominee will likely be an underdog in a state where Republicans have won the last four races for governor.

The 58-year-old resident of Bexley, a Columbus suburb, said in an interview Tuesday that she wants to be governor because she wants to address the concerns she's heard from other Ohioans -- "almost as if I'm their doctor," she said -- about the rising cost of groceries, childcare, healthcare, and housing, among other things.

"I'm running for governor because I refuse to look the other way," Acton said. "I refuse to look the other way while our state continues to go backwards on nearly every measure. And I think we all know it's time for a change."

Acton has previously noted that she has experience not only with state health policy, but with youth homelessness and housing access on a personal level, given [her turbulent childhood in Youngstown](#).

When asked Tuesday what issues she intends to focus on in her campaign, she replied that her job now is to listen to Ohioans about what they care about.

"This is the beginning of a two-year journey, but over this journey, I intend to talk to people deeply and listen to the struggles they're facing," she said. "And together, we're going to build a plan for moving Ohio forward."

Despite being a first-time political candidate, Acton will start the 2026 election cycle with better name ID in Ohio than just about any other Democrat in the state. Acton

shot to state – and even national -- prominence in the spring of 2020 when she and Gov. Mike DeWine held daily televised coronavirus briefings. Acton won over many Ohioans by combining a calm and soothing demeanor with a passionate plea for Ohioans to take precautions like wearing masks and staying at home. [Bobbleheads](#) and [cartoons](#) have been made featuring her.

However, [Acton resigned as health director in June 2020](#) as conservative anger over the state's COVID policies mounted and [protesters repeatedly picketed outside her home](#). That criticism is all but certain to return now that Acton is entering politics.

Asked about how becoming a coronavirus-era figure might affect her electoral chances, Acton replied that Ohioans around the state have told her “about what it was like to run a business and try to keep paying their employees,” but also “what it was like to lose family members and miss birthdays.”

But, she said, Ohio did “flatten the curve,” reducing the state's COVID mortality rate in hospitals from about 50% in March 2020 to 5% when she left the health department in June.

“I hope that (with) the leadership I showed, (that) the analysis has been that I was willing to not look the other way. I was willing to tell people hard truths, give them the information they need, and empower them everywhere they sat, whether they were running a hospital or a prison or a business or their family's lives -- helping them make those decisions they made.”

During the roughly 20-minute interview, Acton blamed unnamed “self-serving politicians” for Ohio's woes, but she didn't mention the words “Republican” or “Democrat.”

Given Ohio has increasingly become a safely Republican state in recent years, Acton and other Democrats will likely need to portray themselves as non-partisan figures in order to win. At the same time, though, the Democratic gubernatorial nominee will also need to be able to help lift up the party's fortunes as well as lower-level Democratic candidates on the ballot.

Asked about how she intends to walk that political tightrope, Acton replied that she worked for DeWine, a Republican, because of their shared values and the need to put partisan politics aside to fix problems.

“Problems don't really care if we're Democrats or Republicans or independents,” she said. “Problems need fixed and they need solved.”

Acton, 58, has a bachelor's degree from Youngstown State University, a medical degree from Northeast Ohio Medical University, and a master's degree in public health from Ohio State University. When DeWine named her to head the Ohio Department of Health in 2019, Acton was an associate professor of public health at Ohio State.

After resigning as state health director, Acton spent a year heading RAPID 5, a nonprofit project to improve connections between waterways, parks, and trails in Central Ohio. She is married with six children.

This isn't Acton's first time looking at running statewide. She was approached about running for U.S. Senate in 2022, but she [ultimately decided against running](#). That race ended up being won by Republican JD Vance, now the vice president-elect.

Other Democrats who have indicated interest in running for Ohio governor in 2026 include House Minority Leader Allison Russo of suburban Columbus and [Chris Redfern, a former state lawmaker and ex-Ohio Democratic Party chair](#).

On the Republican side, [Lt. Gov. Jon Husted](#) and [Attorney General Dave Yost](#) filed paperwork in 2023 to prepare 2026 gubernatorial campaigns. Other GOP figures mentioned as potential candidates include Treasurer Robert Sprague of Findlay and 2024 presidential candidate/entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy of suburban Columbus.