

Peer Review

Review of: "Expanding Contracting Authorities Across the Department of Health and Human Services Family of Agencies to Address Critical Public Health Needs"

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I recommend acceptance of this commentary. The manuscript is timely, well-written, and makes a compelling policy argument regarding the need to expand and codify Other Transaction Authorities (OTAs) within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to support more agile responses during public health emergencies. The use of ICATT as a concrete case example is particularly effective in illustrating how contracting limitations can translate into real-world access gaps.

One minor suggestion to further strengthen the manuscript relates to acronym density and readability, especially for interdisciplinary readers.

Examples where reducing acronym usage could enhance clarity:

- In sections where multiple acronyms are introduced or used within the same paragraph (e.g., HHS, MCM, OTA, FAR, PHE, ICATT, SVI), substituting the full term for acronyms that appear infrequently (such as SVI or MCM when used sparingly) could improve narrative flow.
- In the opening sections describing the ICATT program and contracting mechanisms, repeating "Other Transaction Authorities" or "medical countermeasure services" in place of acronyms at key transition points may help anchor readers who are less familiar with federal acquisition terminology.
- When referencing agencies with compound acronyms (e.g., ASPR/BARDA), occasional use of the full agency name may improve comprehension without sacrificing precision.

Including a brief acronym glossary or table (either at the beginning or as an appendix) would make the commentary more accessible to readers outside of federal contracting and acquisition fields, including public health practitioners, policymakers, and scholars from adjacent disciplines. A glossary would allow readers to quickly reference unfamiliar terms without interrupting their engagement with the argument, thereby broadening the manuscript's reach and usability.

These are minor, easily addressable suggestions that would enhance clarity and accessibility without altering the substance or strength of the manuscript.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.