
SPECIAL REPORT: Obamacare Lost in Translation

HHS has spent at least \$44 million on foreign language translation services since Obamacare became law. This amount is enough to have covered the cost of approximately 1,128,205 mammograms,ⁱ 2,095 knee replacement surgeries,ⁱⁱ and 414 coronary bypass heart surgeries.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Problem

When the Patient Protection & Affordable Care Act^{iv} (ACA), more commonly known as Obamacare, was signed into law on March 23, 2010, the national insurance mandate was touted as a deficit-reducing measure that would save the American taxpayer more than \$1 trillion by cutting chronic health care related spending excess and abuse. Indeed, in his final public address before the law's enactment, President Barack Obama promised the American people that thanks to his signature legislation, consumers would at last get what they were actually paying for.^v However, government audits conducted since implementation of the embattled plan have begun to show that far from saving citizens money, the cost of overhauling the country's insurance system has been exorbitant and only continues to grow.^{vi} More troubling yet is the abject lack of transparency about where the money is going.^{vii}

ProEnglish's Concerns

Of special concern to supporters of ProEnglish's efforts are the mounting costs associated with translating and interpreting taxpayer-funded materials into languages other than English. Since federal agencies' expenditures in this arena show no sign of slowing, no authoritative final tally can be generated yet on this aspect of Obamacare's implementation.

Notwithstanding this accounting barrier, ProEnglish launched an in-depth investigation into the foreign language costs thus far incurred by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS).

The Investigation

ProEnglish started its investigation on October 16, 2013 after submitting a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to HHS seeking all records tending to demonstrate any costs incurred to date for translation or interpretation of Obamacare materials into languages other than English. Despite the agency's statutory obligation to comply within twenty (20) business days, HHS ignored ProEnglish's FOIA request for months and has yet to turn over any information. With the help of FOIA Resource Center, ProEnglish has obtained an HHS spreadsheet listing fifteen (15) contracts involving Obamacare translation and interpretation services spending.^{viii}

Unsurprisingly, the HHS spreadsheet failed to show the actual dollar amount spent on any single contract listed. The agency also did not provide a tally of overall spending. Instead, the agency claimed that because the contract costs were not broken down by services, the portion accounting for translation services could not be revealed.

HHS Spending on Obamacare Translators

Records published at usaspending.gov indicate that as of February 12, 2014, the federal government had disbursed more than \$4.6 billion in connection with the Affordable Care Act.^{ix} HHS was responsible for 99.07% of this spending. Aside from the contracts referenced above that HHS has yet to disclose, the agency spent more than \$44 million during the same period on services and materials provided in languages other than English. In other words, the amount of money that HHS has spent on foreign language

translation services since the ACA was signed into law could have paid for 1,128,205 mammograms, 2,095 knee-replacements, and 414 coronary bypass surgeries.

Even as the vague contract descriptions make it difficult to discern a valid basis for approving the expenses, the agreements all seem to point in support of ACA's implementation.

Below are some of the most expensive awards found:

- On June 27 and October 28, 2013, HHS gave a combined \$4,520,722 to the Council for the Spanish Speaking, Inc. (based in Milwaukee, WI), for unspecified costs related to Head Start.^x

- On August 30, 2010, HHS paid \$1.6 million to The Media Network, Inc. (based in Silver Spring, MD) to conduct a year-long "Spanish-language ad campaign."

- On June 20 and December 11, 2013, HHS gave a combined \$1,417,054 to the Spanish Speaking Unity Council (based in Oakland, CA) for unspecified costs related to Head Start.^{xi}

- On August 30, 2011 and April 30, 2012, HHS paid \$2,398,749 to the Quijote Corporation (based in Los Angeles, CA) to conduct a "Spanish-language multimedia and grassroots campaign."

- On December 23, 2009 and August 30, 2010, HHS gave the Spanish Speaking Unity Council another combined \$2,234,400 in American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds to expand its Early Head Start program.^{xii}

- On July 1, 2010 and July 20, 2011, HHS gave a combined \$2,047,543 to the Center for Applied Linguistics (based in Washington, DC) to study the development of literacy in Spanish-speaking children.

- On December 11, 2009 and July 29, 2010, HHS also gave \$1,820,015 to the Milwaukee-based Council for the Spanish Speaking in ARRA expansion funds for Early Head Start.



Search Summary Results

Total Dollars: \$4,660,135,320
Number of Transactions: 2,227

All Spending Data

Top 5 Prime Award Recipient Locations (States)	
1. California	\$1,068,060,320
2. New York	\$334,798,603
3. Oregon	\$286,161,341
4. Kentucky	\$223,204,320
5. Colorado	\$209,240,433

Top 5 Prime Award Major Agencies	
1. Department of Health and Human Services	\$4,620,125,334
3. Department of Treasury	\$38,881,591
3. Department of Agriculture	\$2,375,237
4. Department of Labor	\$1,090,753

Top 10 Prime Awards in FY2014	
1. Assistance: Department of Health and Human Services HBEIE130148	\$673,705,358
2. Assistance: Department of Health and Human Services HBEIE130144	\$220,442,074
3. Assistance: Department of Health and Human Services HBEIE130146	\$185,822,357
4. Assistance: Department of Health and Human Services HBEIE130150	\$182,707,738

Current as of Feb. 17, 2014

5. Department of Veterans Affairs	\$580,406	5. Assistance: Department of Health and Human Services HBEIE130148	\$155,076,686
Top 5 Prime Award Sub Agencies			
1. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services	\$2,308,871,543	6. Assistance: Department of Health and Human Services HBEIE130169	\$116,245,677
2. Health Resources and Services Administration	\$2,188,202,927	7. Assistance: Department of Health and Human Services HBEIE140191	\$84,633,761
3. Centers for Disease Control	\$77,361,044	8. Assistance: Department of Health and Human Services HBEIE130143	\$80,225,650
4. Internal Revenue Service	\$38,881,591	9. Assistance: Department of Health and Human Services HBEIE130141	\$73,961,296
5. Administration for Children and Families	\$37,186,471	10. Assistance: Department of Health and Human Services HBEIE120133	\$72,985,333

Current as of Feb. 17, 2014

Our Continued Fight for Transparency

This loss to taxpayers has represented a boon to some individuals. In 2009, Luis Gutierrez, who owns Dream Management, Inc. based in Baltimore, MD, lamented the impact of a sagging economy on small business owners such as himself.^{xiii} Yet, with the passage of Obamacare, Gutierrez's specially designated minority set-aside enterprise has won him \$39,000 in federal contracts annually by offering over-the-phone translations to HHS workers struggling to communicate with non-English speaking callers. Another like Gutierrez is Adam Shapiro, who won \$25,000 from HHS last year to promote the use of Medline (the federal government's Spanish-language version of WebMD) to Spanish speakers on Facebook.

While these single contracts may seem insignificant when considered individually, ProEnglish launched its investigation precisely to expose and prevent these abuses as it fights unrelentingly to make English the official language of the United States.

ProEnglish will continue exercising oversight of the federal government's expenditures on translation and interpretation of Obamacare materials into languages other than English. ProEnglish will also continue to keep its supporters apprised of any new documents it obtains.

Appendix B

Contract No.	Task Order No.	Contract Title	Brief Description of Scope	Description of Translation Req.	Comments
HHSM-500-2013-00003C	N/A	Contact Center Operations (CCO)	CCO responds to inquiries from CMS's customer service population (includes Medicare and Marketplace inquiries)	Customer Service Reps read Spanish scripts to Spanish speaking callers	ACA related translations under this contract are a small part of the overall effort. Costs for this service are not broken out separately.
HHSM-500-2013-00103C	N/A	Training, Quality and Content (TQC)	Provides Training, QA and Content development in Support of CMS's CCO.	Content is developed in both English and Spanish	ACA related translations under this contract are only a part of the overall effort. Costs for this service are not broken out separately.
HHSM-500-2007-000011	HHSM-500-T0002	Print and Language Line Services	Print Fulfillment and Translation Services for the CCO	Third party interpretation of inquiries from the CCO. Some document translations as well.	ACA related translations under this contract are only a part of the overall effort. Costs for this service are not broken out separately.
GS-10F-0208T	HHSM-500-2012-00152G	Translation Services	Foreign language translation services of CMS communications products.	Foreign language translation services of CMS communications products.	ACA related translations under this contract are only a part of the overall effort. Costs for this service are not broken out separately.
GS-10F-0227K	HHSM-500-2011-00145G	Translation Services and Analysis Reports	Foreign language translation services of CMS communications products about CMS programs and to gather and analyze language data trends.	Foreign language translation services of CMS communications products about CMS programs.	ACA related translations under this contract are only a part of the overall effort. Costs for this service are not broken out separately.
IA-13-05 (Department of Interior)		Web Hosting and Translation Services	Web Hosting and Translation Services	Web Hosting and Translation Services	ACA related translations under this contract are only a part of the overall effort. Costs for this service are not broken out separately.
GS-07F-0406T	HHSM-500-2013-00257G	Hispanic Health Insurance Exchange and Public Education and Outreach	Implement a Health Insurance Exchange Public Education and Outreach Campaign to reach the Spanish language reliant, uninsured audience, in the FFE States	Translation requests under this contract are ad hoc and minimal	ACA related translations under this contract are only a part of the overall effort. Costs for this service are not broken out separately.
HHSM-500-2011-00069C Mod 2		Hispanic Multi-Media Campaign	Develop, execute, and assess two national, integrated Spanish language multi-media education campaigns-Open Enrollment and Prevention	Translation requests under this contract are ad hoc and minimal	ACA related translations under this contract are only a part of the overall effort. Costs for this service are not broken out separately.
HHSM-500-2013-00118C	N/A	Eligibility Support	Provides mailroom intake, routing, verification, and troubleshooting of Marketplace applications	As needed, the contractor translates documentation into English and provides translation services for outbound telephone calls.	ACA related translations under this contract are only a part of the overall effort. Costs for this service are not broken out separately.
HHSM-500-2013-00167C	N/A	Eligibility Appeals Operations Support	Provides services in support of the Marketplace eligibility appeals process	As needed, the contractor translates appeals correspondence	ACA related translations under this contract are only a part of the overall effort. Costs for this service are not broken out separately.
GS-23F-9755H	HHSM-500-2012-00162G	Oversight of Agents, Brokers, and Application Program Interface (API) Access	Provides services associated with training, registration, and oversight of agents and brokers who enroll individuals and small groups in the Marketplace	As needed, the contractor provides translation services associated with training materials	ACA related translations under this contract are only a part of the overall effort. Costs for this service are not broken out separately.
GS-10F-00112J	HHSM-500-2012-00100G	Exchange Satisfaction Survey	Develops enrollee satisfaction survey to be administered to members of QHPs offered through the Marketplace	The contractor designs surveys that can be translated into non-English languages	ACA related translations under this contract are only a part of the overall effort. Costs for this service are not broken out separately.
GS-23F-9806H	HHSM-500-2013-00293G	Enrollment Assistance Program	Provides consumers with in-person support services to facilitate Marketplace enrollment (multiple award contract)	As needed, the contractor provides interpretive services in connection with in-person enrollment support.	ACA related translations under this contract are only a part of the overall effort. Costs for this service are not broken out separately.
GS-10F-0579N	HHSM-500-2013-00295G	Enrollment Assistance Program	Provides consumers with in-person support services to facilitate Marketplace enrollment (multiple award contract)	As needed, the contractor provides interpretive services in connection with in-person enrollment support.	ACA related translations under this contract are only a part of the overall effort. Costs for this service are not broken out separately.
HHSM-500-2007-00015I	HHSM-500-T0007	Website Maintenance and Support Services	Provides assessment, development, testing, implementing, maintenance and making improvements to applications to the Agency's websites in agency standard technologies	Lastly, the contractor shall provide CMS with the technical and foreign language translation services required to deliver written information (e.g., internet static web pages and dynamic online tool content) about CMS related programs (i.e., Health Insurance Marketplace, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Medicare and Medicaid programs including expansion activities) to people with limited English proficiency.	ACA related translations under this contract are only a part of the overall effort. Costs for this service are not broken out separately.

Endnotes

ⁱ According to its website, HHS.gov/HealthCare, the average out-of-pocket cost of a mammogram prior to the ACA becoming law was \$39 per individual. "Women and the Affordable Care Act," May 10, 2013. <http://www.hhs.gov/healthcare/facts/factsheets/2011/08/affordable-care-act-women.html>

ⁱⁱ "Knee replacement surgery debate shifts from cost to benefits," CNBC, Aug. 22, 2013, citing the Journal of Bone & Joint Surgery <http://www.cnbc.com/id/100978057>

ⁱⁱⁱ "Heart Surgery in India for \$1,583 Costs \$106,385 in U.S.," Bloomberg, July 28, 2013, citing the average cost of coronary bypass heart surgery at Ohio's Cleveland Clinic as provided by data on CMS.gov. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-07-28/heart-surgery-in-india-for-1-583-costs-106-385-in-u-s-.html>

^{iv} <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111publ148/pdf/PLAW-111publ148.pdf>

^v <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-house-vote-health-insurance-reform>

^{vi} http://www.treasury.gov/tigta/auditreports/2013reports/201313115_oa_highlights.pdf

^{vii} <http://www.forbes.com/sites/theapothecary/2013/10/14/obamacares-website-is-crashing-because-it-doesnt-want-you-to-know-health-plans-true-costs/>

^{viii} HHS's spreadsheet is here attached as Appendix B.

^{ix} These results are here attached as Appendix A.

^x According to its website, the Council for the Spanish Speaking has 733 students enrolled in its Head Start program, representing tuition of \$6,167.

^{xi} According to its website, the Spanish Speaking Unity Council has a total of 119 students, not all of them enrolled in the actual Head Start program. Even if all students took part in Head Start, this grant amounts to \$22,721 per child, costing taxpayers twice as much tuition as a first-year pays at Virginia Tech.

^{xii} Assuming all students referenced in footnote 8 were in the Early Head Start arm of the school instead, this represents tuition of \$9,388 per year.

^{xiii} <http://www.bizjournals.com/baltimore/stories/2009/11/23/smallb4.html>