



# RRB News

## U.S. Railroad Retirement Board

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### **RRB Will Use Survey Results to Improve Disability Benefit Programs**

The U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) earned a score of 70 in a recent survey of disability annuitants using methodology of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI). The study was conducted by the Federal Consulting Group and Claes Fornell International over a one-month period in November and December of 2022. A total of 258 individuals took part in the telephone survey.

The objective of the survey was to gather feedback from disability annuitants on their experiences as recipients of agency disability processes to help the RRB make data-driven decisions on investing in initiatives with the greatest potential for increasing customer satisfaction.

The results of the survey showed that annuitants ranked the RRB's customer service and the consultative exam process most highly, with scores of 76 and 71, respectively. The consultative exam is a specialized medical exam ordered by the RRB that is geared to specific disabilities identified in the disability application and any medical evidence submitted with it. The study showed that about 60 percent of those surveyed were subject to a consultative exam.

The RRB awards two types of disability annuities. One is for total disability that prohibits any gainful employment and is identical to disability benefits paid by the Social Security Administration for non-railroad employees. The other type, occupational disability, pays benefits to railroad employees whose disability prevents them from working in their particular railroad job.

Overall, occupational disability annuitants gave the process a score of 73, slightly higher than the process score of 67 for total disability beneficiaries. In this survey, just over half of the overall score was attributable to occupational disability annuitants. The last survey of this group of RRB customers took place in 2006, when occupational disability annuitants accounted for about three-fourths of the overall score.

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The overall satisfaction score of 70 is 15 points lower than the last study of this group. The survey administrators noted that this is consistent with the ACSI trend for the federal government as a whole, with COVID-related challenges negatively impacting satisfaction with federal services. This was reflected in comments by participants in the RRB survey, along with the increased emphasis in the most recent survey on total disability annuitants.

Nevertheless, the RRB's overall score of 70 is still above the most recent ACSI score of 67 for the entire federal government. The overall federal score had also shown a decline since 2006 but has shown an upward trend over the past year as pandemic limitations and restrictions ended.

The areas identified as most in need of improvement in the survey were the process for issuing a final decision and the process of completing an application. Both groups surveyed gave low scores to the decision letter process, with a score of 67 by occupational disability annuitants and 63 for total disability annuitants. The biggest complaint by both groups was the amount of time it took to receive a final decision.

In terms of filing an application, the groups gave similar scores, with occupational disability slightly higher at 62 and total disability beneficiaries at 60. Specific concerns in this area included the ease of completing an application and the amount of time required.

Based on the results of the survey, the RRB will continue to strive for excellence in the areas of customer service and consultative medical exams while identifying improvements to other aspects of the disability application process that will have the greatest impact on performance, efficiency, accuracy, and customer satisfaction.

The ACSI methodology has measured hundreds of federal programs since 1999 and allows for benchmarking performance between the public and private sectors, providing information unique to each agency and program on how service delivery impacts customer satisfaction.

In fiscal year 2021, the RRB paid \$751 million in disability benefits, with \$515 million attributable to occupational disability and \$236 million to total disability. A total of 18,600 individuals received disability annuities, with 10,800 getting occupational disability benefits and 7,800 receiving total disability benefits.