



Summary Report: Federal Public Servants with Disabilities: October 2019 Follow Up Survey on Workplace Accommodations

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Objectives and methodology

Objective

In May 2019, the Office of Public Service Accessibility (OPSA) conducted [the first of two online surveys on workplace accommodations in the Federal Public Service](#) as part of a Benchmarking Study to better understand the experiences of employees and managers in navigating the existing accommodation process. In-depth follow-up Public Opinion Research (POR) online surveys were conducted in the fall of 2019 to obtain a deeper understanding of the key findings emerging from that survey. This presentation summarizes the feedback received in response to separate Employee and Supervisor follow-up (POR) surveys. This research will be used to guide improvements to the process of obtaining workplace accommodations in order to enable employees with disabilities to contribute to their full potential.

Methodology

Envronics designed the survey instrument and OPSA conducted the online survey with federal public servants between October 22 and 29, 2019. These are non-probability samples of employees and supervisors who participated in the May 2019 survey and asked to be contacted for follow-up consultation. As a result, this sample cannot be considered representative of all federal public service employees who have experience with workplace accommodations. Employees and supervisors responded to different questionnaires, with each survey taking approximately 30 minutes to complete. A total of **980** valid surveys were completed: **802** by employees and **178** by supervisors.

Reporting

Employees were asked to consider a specific accommodation request they felt was most impactful to them when answering the survey. Unless otherwise noted, employee results in this presentation deck focus on accommodation requests that were “disability-related”, meaning that they involved an accommodation related to a chronic health condition or disability. In total, 743 of the 802 (93%) employee surveys were “disability-related”. In terms of supervisors’ responses, results are presented for all 178 supervisors unless otherwise noted. Because the survey was anonymous, it is important to note that there is no direct correlation between the individual responses of employees and supervisors.

Key findings

1. Employees are reluctant to make an accommodation request due to concerns about damaging their reputation with supervisors and co-workers, experiencing harassment or discrimination, or hurting their career prospects.
2. Nine in ten employees are asked to provide evidence to support their accommodation request, which contributes to feelings that they are not trusted or valued. Clarity about information required from specialists is also needed.
3. Both employees and supervisors feel the system is cumbersome and needs to be streamlined. The length of time to get an accommodation is a major concern,

especially when procurement-related activities are involved.

4. Supervisors often lack the support, resources and guidance to handle accommodation requests effectively. Better resources and training, including support from functional experts, would be beneficial.
5. Employees suggest that a more open, supportive and understanding attitude among supervisors towards employees making accommodation requests would lead to better outcomes and more effective accommodation.
6. A centralized accommodation request system with a larger role for arms-length neutral experts could address several concerns including supervisor reprisal, protecting employee privacy and reducing the burden on supervisors.
7. A significant barrier for many employees is the need to make multiple requests or repeatedly submit medical certificates or other evidence for the same accommodation, due to a change in their position, office or supervisor.
8. Employees' views about their future career prospects are connected to their experience with the accommodation process, with optimism being strongest among those with an approved accommodation that is fully in place.
9. Ineffective accommodation leads to negative outcomes, such as employees leaving their position or leaving the public service altogether, retiring early, taking extended sick leave or being unable to contribute to their full potential.

Profile of survey participants

▼ In this section

- Disability-related accommodation requests are primarily made to address barriers related to a chronic health condition, pain or mental health issues
- A majority of supervisors have handled an average of one accommodation request per year or fewer, but most have experience with requests involving invisible conditions or disabilities

Disability-related accommodation requests are primarily made to address barriers related to a chronic health condition, pain or mental

health issues

Table 1: Condition or disability (primary or other) that led to accommodation request

Condition or disability (primary or other) that led to accommodation request	Disability-related accommodation request
A chronic health condition or pain	36%
A mental health issue	19%
A mobility issue	10%
Issues with flexibility or dexterity	9%
A sensory / environmental disability	9%
A cognitive disability	7%
A seeing disability	5%
A hearing disability	3%
An intellectual disability	less than 1%
I prefer not to answer	3%

Table 2: Nature of condition or disability (primary or other) for which accommodation was requested

Nature of condition or disability (primary or other) for which accommodation was requested	Disability-related accommodation request
Permanent	63%
Episodic (recurring)	28%
Temporary	6%
I prefer not to answer	4%

Table 3: Is the condition visible or invisible (from the employee's perspective)?

|--|--|

Is the condition visible or invisible (from the employee's perspective)?	Disability-related accommodation request
Invisible	86%
Visible	14%

Source:

- Q3/Q8. Which of the following categories most closely describes the nature of your primary condition or disability / other condition or disability that led to your accommodation request? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)
- Q4/Q9. Is (or was) your primary chronic health condition, pain, environmental sensitivity or other disability / temporary, episodic or permanent? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)
- Q5. Would you describe your primary chronic health condition, pain, environmental sensitivity or other disability as being...? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability and details of condition/disability are known, n=643)

A majority of supervisors have handled an average of one accommodation request per year or fewer, but most have experience with requests involving invisible conditions or disabilities

Table 4: Number of separate requests for employees made in the past three years

Number of separate requests for employees made in the past three years	All supervisors
1	14%
2	17%
3	21%
4 or 5	20%
More than 5	28%

Table 5: Experience with invisible conditions or disabilities

Experience with invisible conditions or disabilities	All supervisors
Yes, I have experience with invisible conditions.	74%
No, I do not have experience with invisible conditions.	11%
Have not handled an accommodation request related to a permanent, chronic or episodic disability or health condition.	15%

Source:

- Q2. As a supervisor, how many workplace accommodation requests were requested for your employees in the past 3 years, for any reason? (all supervisors, n=178)
- Q4. For requests that you received in the past 3 years for a workplace accommodation to address a permanent, chronic or episodic (recurring) disability or health condition, did any of these requests involve a disability or health condition that was invisible, meaning that someone interacting with this employee in the workplace would, in most cases, be unaware of their disability or health condition? (all supervisors, n=178)

Pre-request phase

▼ In this section

- Before making an accommodation request, employees are concerned that it will result in reprisal from supervisors and a damaged reputation; the inability to cope any longer leads employees to make the request.
- Employees completing this survey are more likely to report recent harassment and discrimination than employees with disabilities completing the 2019 PSES and a large majority believe this experience was related to their condition or disability.

- More than four in ten employees previously did not request an accommodation that would have improved their ability to do their job, often due to concerns about management perceptions and negative career implications.
- Employees cited fear of negative perceptions and career effects, lack of supervisor knowledge, absence of a supportive environment and a time-consuming process as key challenges.
- Only one in ten supervisors find the accommodation process very clear, and a majority do not find it very clear where to get assistance for a request.
- Supervisor suggestions on how to improve the process include step-by-step resources, better training on accommodation requests and standardized procedures across departments.

Before making an accommodation request, employees are concerned that it will result in reprisal from supervisors and a damaged reputation; the inability to cope any longer leads employees to make the request

Thoughts and feelings during the pre-request phase:

- **Stress, fear or anxiety** that the accommodation request would result in negative repercussions, that the accommodation would be denied or that other people would form negative opinions about them.
- **Frustration** with the cumbersome process when it should be straightforward.
- Feeling **devalued** by the process, that no one cares about their condition or situation or that they are not important enough to receive accommodation.
- **Embarrassment or guilt** from the feeling of being a burden to their team or that they are letting down their team or manager

What led to the decision to request a workplace accommodation?

- No longer able to cope / barriers affecting ability to carry out job-related duties. Reaching a tipping point after a period of avoiding making a request. Employees

often cite a fear of being fired or facing other negative professional consequences if they did not receive the required accommodation.

- Change in work environment or situation. A change in the environment which introduces or exacerbates an existing condition. This includes office moves or changes to a workspace which necessitate an accommodation, a change in work status or the need to replace equipment.
- Getting an accommodation to avoid going on sick leave. Accommodation is requested because the alternative is going on extended sick leave. They feel the status quo would have required them to stop working to recover and they express a preference for continuing to work rather than going on leave.

Source:

- Q13. What ultimately led to your decision to request a workplace accommodation (as opposed to continuing with the status quo)? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)
- Q16. What were the 1 or 2 main thoughts or feelings you had during the time before you presented your request for accommodation? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)

Employees completing this survey are more likely to report recent harassment ^{*} and discrimination ^{*} than employees with disabilities completing the 2019 PSES ^{} and a large majority believe this experience was related to their condition or disability**

Table 6: Victim of harassment or discrimination in the past 12 months

Question	Yes	No	I prefer not to answer
Victim of harassment	38 %	56 %	6 %
Victim of discrimination	35 %	57 %	8 %

Table 7: Extent to which harassment or discrimination was related to condition or disability

Question	Strongly	Somewhat	Not	I prefer not to
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	related	related	related	answer
Harassment	48 %	24 %	26 %	2 %
Discrimination	65 %	20 %	14 %	1 %

Source:

- Q55. In the past 12 months, have you been the victim of harassment? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)
- Q56. In your opinion, to what extent was the harassment you experienced in the past 12 months related to your chronic health condition or disability? (employees who have experienced harassment in the past 12 months, n=286)
- Q57. In the past 12 months, have you been the victim of discrimination? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)
- Q58. In your opinion, to what extent was the discrimination you experienced in the past 12 months related to your chronic health condition or disability? (employees who have experienced discrimination in the past 12 months, n=263)

More than four in ten employees previously did not request an accommodation that would have improved their ability to do their job, often due to concerns about management perceptions and negative career implications

Table 8: Have chosen not to request an accommodation

Have chosen not to request an accommodation	Employees
Yes	43%
No	42%
Not applicable or have not required another accommodation	13%
I prefer not to answer	3%

Table 9: Reasons for not requesting accommodation (top responses)

Reasons for not requesting accommodation (top responses)	Employees who have chosen not to make a
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	request
Concerned about management's perception of me.	75%
Concerned it might affect my job security or future career prospects.	63%
Concerned about my relationship with my supervisor.	53%
Believed my request would not be approved.	52%
Didn't want to disclose information about workplace barriers or my chronic condition or disability.	48%
Concerned about my co-workers' perception of me.	46%

Source:

- Q46. Have you ever chosen not to request an accommodation that would have improved your ability to carry out your job-related duties? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)
- Q47. When you chose not to request an accommodation that would have improved your ability to carry out your job-related duties, what were your reasons for this? (employees who have chosen not to request an accommodation, n=317) Note: respondents could choose multiple responses.

Employees cited fear of negative perceptions and career effects, lack of supervisor knowledge, absence of a supportive environment and a time-consuming process as key challenges

Main challenges or concerns when deciding whether to request an accommodation:

- Negative perceptions among peers (that they are 'high maintenance' or not being a team player) and a fear of reprisal from their supervisor (such as

potential harassment, bullying or reputational damage affecting their career prospects) were often cited as concerns.

- Unsupportive or unresponsive supervisors cause employees to feel they are not being taken seriously. Several employees said some managers need to be convinced that the accommodation is necessary and are not genuinely working in the employee's interests.
- Lack of knowledge and experience among supervisors (and themselves) about the accommodation process, not knowing where or how to start the process or who to contact for assistance or services were cited as key challenges.
- Long wait times and delays are common when navigating the accommodation process; it is time-consuming attending appointments with doctors or specialists, filling in paperwork and having to repeatedly explain their condition.

What would make it easier for you to decide to request an accommodation?

- Including knowledgeable, impartial and arms-length staff in the process to help address issues such as lack of supervisor knowledge about the process, protecting personal health information, concerns that managers and Labour Relations only work in management's interest, and avoiding potential reprisal.
- A more supportive attitude from managers, such as displaying more empathy, supporting employees by working with them instead of against them, being more open and accepting about disabilities and assurances they will not face reprisal.
- Better training for managers about accommodation requests as some managers are not experienced or knowledgeable enough about the process or workplace accommodation in general.
- A clearer and simpler request process. Clear communication about the steps that must be taken, a less convoluted and time-consuming process, and a website or information-line with clear instructions.

Source:

- Q14. What were the 1 or 2 main challenges or concerns you had, if any, when deciding whether to request an accommodation? (accommodation request

related to a condition or disability, n=743)

- Q15. What 1 or 2 things, if any, would have made it easier for you to decide to request an accommodation? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)

Only one in ten supervisors find the accommodation process very clear, and a majority do not find it very clear where to get assistance for a request

Table 10: Clarity of process for supervisors

Question	Very clear	Somewhat clear	Not very clear	Not at all clear	I prefer not to answer
How clear is the process for supervisors requesting an accommodation for an employee?	11 %	51 %	26 %	11 %	1 %

Table 11: Clarity of who to contact for assistance

Question	Very clear	Somewhat clear	Not very clear	Not at all clear	I prefer not to answer
How clear is it who to contact for assistance when processing an accommodation request?	30 %	37 %	17 %	15 %	1 %

Source:

- Q11. In your view, is the process clear for supervisors who request an accommodation for an employee? (all supervisors, n=178)
- Q12. In your view, is it clear who you should contact for assistance in processing an accommodation request for an employee? (all supervisors, n=178)

Supervisor suggestions on how to improve the process include step-by-step resources, better training on accommodation requests and standardized procedures across departments

How could aspects of the accommodation process be clearer for supervisors?

- Clear step-by-step description of the process such as a clear and simple step-by-step overview of the process in the form of a flow chart, process map or checklist.
- Better organization of existing resources. Some supervisors have difficulty finding existing information or resources on their departmental intranet and information about different steps in the process aren't all in the same place. Information should be more centralized and contain clear contact information for getting assistance.
- More training on accommodations. Mandatory training for all supervisors when they are first appointed, to ensure they have a good base of understanding before they are required to handle an accommodation request, and on an ongoing basis to ensure they have the most recent information.
- Better resources for employees. A simple document or resource designed for employees was suggested so they have a better understanding of the process going in as well as their responsibilities.
- Having more standardized procedures and processes across departments is seen as something that would clarify things since, currently, different departments have different approaches and levels of availability for internal resources who can assist with requests.

Source:

- Q13. How could any aspect of the accommodation process be made clearer for supervisors such as yourself? (all supervisors, n=178)

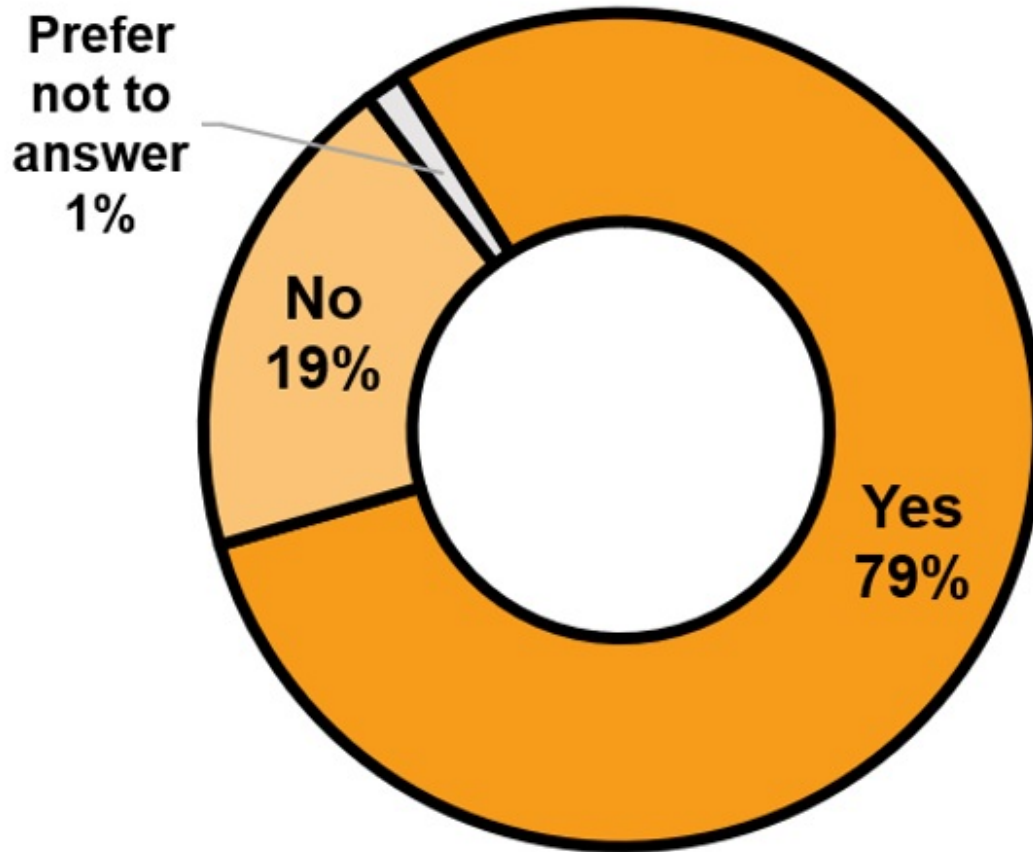
Assessment phase

▼ In this section

- More than three quarters of employees required a medical certificate or other evidence; the proportion was significantly higher for those with invisible disabilities (83%) as compared to visible disabilities (67%). Clarifying the information requirements would avoid repeated trips to specialists and would speed up the process.
- Seven in ten employees were required to get a formal assessment by a medical doctor or specialist; this skews higher among those with flexibility, mobility and chronic pain, and for those with an invisible disability.
- Both employees and managers suggest streamlining the assessment process and clarifying the information requirements.
- Employees further suggest that assistance for those making an accommodation request and more understanding from managers are required.
- Supervisors emphasized the need for training and support, clarity around medical evidence and a simplified procurement process.

More than three quarters of employees required a medical certificate or other evidence; the proportion was significantly higher for those with invisible disabilities (83%) as compared to visible disabilities (67%). Clarifying the information requirements would avoid repeated trips to specialists and would speed up the process

Figure 1: Required to get a medical certificate and/or other evidence



▼ Figure 1: Text version

Required to get a medical certificate and/or other evidence.

A donut chart showing the results:

- yes 79%
- no 19%
- prefer not to answer 1%

What could be improved about the medical certificate request process?

- Clarity around requirements for certification. It is not always clear what information medical professionals are being asked to provide, often resulting in the need to make numerous trips. More precise information requests and forms or an online system could help to avoid this problem.
- Ignoring or doubting medical advice. In some cases, managers doubt or reject the advice of medical professionals and specialists when provided.
- Certificates should not always be required. Some feel medical certificates should not be required for ergonomic accommodations or in the case of permanent or

chronic conditions, particularly in cases where this information has been provided previously. Some feel a certificate should not be necessary at all as employees can be trusted to express their own needs.

- Certificates are expensive and time-consuming: The cost of paying for medical certificates and other evidence is commonly raised, along with how time-consuming it is to attend multiple appointments. It is often necessary for employees to take time off work (or use sick days) to go to the appointments.

Source:

- Q18. Were you required to provide a medical certificate or other evidence to support the accommodation request? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)
- Q19. What 1 or 2 things, if any, could be improved about the medical certificate request process? (employees required to provide a medical certificate, n=590)

Seven in ten employees were required to get a formal assessment by a medical doctor or specialist; this skews higher among those with flexibility, mobility and chronic pain, and for those with an invisible disability

Table 12: Required to participate in a formal assessment for health condition or disability request

Required to participate in a formal assessment for health condition or disability request	Employees
Yes	70%
No	28%
I prefer not to say	2%

Table 13. Required to participate in a formal assessment by health condition or disability type

Health condition or disability type	Required to participate in a formal assessment

Issues with flexibility or dexterity	85%
Mobility issue	77%
Chronic health condition or pain	75%
Cognitive disability	74%
Mental health issue	68%
Seeing disability	49%
Sensory/environmental disability	48%
Hearing disability	47%

Source:

- Q20. Were you required to participate in any of the following of formal assessments by a medical doctor or specialist? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)

Both employees and managers suggest streamlining the assessment process and clarifying the information requirements

Employees – What could be improved about the formal assessment request process?

- Speed up the process and have the evaluations done more quickly.
- Process should use dedicated, and specialized staff to address issues around a lack of knowledge and experience among supervisors, protecting employee privacy, the speed of the process and consistency of approvals across departments.
- Information requirements should be appropriate to the situation: Assessments often are not calibrated to the circumstances of the accommodation request. Examples include the “fitness to work” assessment containing very little about mental health, and those with permanent conditions being asked to undergo repeated assessments.

- Follow medical advice: In some cases, managers disagreed with, or otherwise questioned, the results of the assessment or requested the assessment because they disagreed with earlier medical evidence provided.

Supervisors – Suggested improvements to the formal assessment process that would improve outcomes:

- Streamline and speed up the process. It takes too long to go through assessments and the approach should be streamlined.
- Provide ergonomic equipment without requiring a doctor's assessment. Ergonomic assessments could be considered sufficient evidence to receive an accommodation (not requiring evidence from a medical specialist) and conducting these ergonomic assessments internally would save time and money.
- Replace or refine the Occupational Fitness Assessment Form (OFAF). Some view the OFAF as being too long, too complex and relying too much on employees for workplace information when filling it in. Suggestions include pre-populating some information about the workplace or position in the form and either revamping the existing form or creating a new and simpler one.

Source:

- Q21. What 1 or 2 things, if any, could be improved about the formal assessment process? (employees who were required to participate in a formal assessment, n=518)
- Q16. From what you know or have heard, what suggestions, if any, do you have about how to change or improve the formal assessment process that would lead to better accommodation outcomes? (all supervisors, n=178)

Employees further suggest that assistance for those making an accommodation request and more understanding from managers are required

Aside from medical certificates and assessments, what would have improved the assessment phase?

- Provide employees with more information and assistance such as providing more information about how the request process works and access to knowledgeable and experienced people who can assist them. This person could also act as an advocate for employees who often find themselves in a vulnerable position.
- More understanding from managers. Supervisors should be more understanding about accommodation requests to combat employees' feeling that their request is nothing but a burden. Sensitivity training was also suggested for managers who deal with accommodation requests.
- More input from employees. Employee requests should be taken more 'at face value' – employees know best what they need and including medical professionals adds an unnecessary layer to the process.
- Allow temporary accommodations. Since the accommodation process can be long, temporary accommodations should be made available where possible, until the outcome of the request is decided, to mitigate the impact of delays on employees' health and productivity.
- Accountability of managers. Make managers more accountable for ensuring that accommodation requests are handled promptly and fairly.

Source:

- Q22. Aside from requests for medical certificates or formal assessments by a medical doctor or specialist, is there anything else that could have been done to improve the assessment phase? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)

Supervisors emphasized the need for training and support, clarity around medical evidence and a simplified procurement process

Supervisor problems and challenges with the request process: what needs to be done differently?

- More training, guidance and assistance. Supervisors want better access to 'hands-on' assistance from functional experts. A clear, step-by-step guide for managers and joint union-management training to create a shared

understanding of roles and responsibilities for all parties would also be beneficial.

- Clarify the role of medical evidence. There is a lack of clarity around the role medical professionals play: should they be providing information only about functional limitations or also providing specific recommendations on accommodations as expert advisors?
- Difficult and complex process. The cumbersome nature of the request process and 'red-tape' are challenges. The amount of medical and other evidence required, the number of approvals needed and issues with procurement processes and installation. There are suggestions of a more streamlined and simplified process, especially when it comes to providing adaptive devices.
- Should trust employees and doctors more. Among supervisors, there are concerns that the process creates the impression that supervisors do not trust employees. Some suggest being more accepting of the request by not requiring as much medical or other evidence.

Source:

- Q9. What problems or challenges, if any, have you encountered during the request process that you feel need to be done differently? (all supervisors, n=178)

Decision and outcome phase

▼ In this section

- Nine in ten decided requests were approved, but less than two thirds of the approved accommodations are fully in place
- More than half of employees are dissatisfied with the length of time to get the accommodation, including four in ten whose accommodation is fully in place and seven in ten whose accommodation is not yet fully in place
- Challenges in the decision phase include delays and accommodations that are not fully or properly implemented; employees also cite negative

- supervisor attitudes while supervisors cite funding or procurement issues
- Having an employee advocate for the accommodation process, better training for managers, improved procurement processes and a centralized record of approved accommodations are common employee suggestions for improving outcomes
- A third of supervisors don't feel they have what they need to effectively manage accommodation requests; a quarter do not feel supported by senior management
- Supervisors would like more process information, a more centralized approach and greater access to experts and informational resources
- Less than a third of employees are satisfied with the accommodation process overall
- A large majority of employees and supervisors believe an "accommodation passport" would be very helpful
- Employees' views about their future in the federal public service are connected to their experience with the accommodation process; optimism is strongest among employees with an approved accommodation fully in place
- Employees cite a variety of reasons for having positive or negative feelings about their future career prospects in the federal public service

Nine in ten decided requests were approved, but less than two thirds of the approved accommodations are fully in place

Table 14. Status of approved accommodations by health condition or disability type

Health condition or disability type	Accommodation request approved (among known outcomes)	Approved request is fully in place (among approved requests)
All condition and disability types	90%	64%
Issues with flexibility	98%	59%

or dexterity		
Seeing disability (small sample size, interpret with caution)	97%	68%
Chronic health condition or pain	91%	64%
Mobility issue	89%	71%
Cognitive disability	89%	39%
Sensory/environmental disability	84%	63%
Mental health issue	79%	56%
Hearing disability (small sample size, interpret with caution)	78%	57%

Source:

- Q24. As of now, is your accommodation request ...?: (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, outcome known [n=599])
- Q25. Is your approved accommodation currently...? : (employees whose accommodation request was approved, n=537)

More than half of employees are dissatisfied with the length of time to get the accommodation, including four in ten whose accommodation is fully in place and seven in ten whose accommodation is not yet fully in place

Table 15. Satisfaction with length of time it took or is taking for accommodation to be put in place

Satisfaction with length of time it took or is taking for accommodation to be put in place	Accommodation approved and fully in place	Accommodation approved but partially or not in place

Very satisfied	30%	5%
Somewhat satisfied	23%	10%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	7%	9%
Somewhat dissatisfied	11%	14%
Very dissatisfied	29%	57%
I prefer not to answer	Less than 1%	4%

Source:

- Q27. How satisfied are you with the length of time it took for your accommodation to be put in place? (employees whose accommodation is fully in place, n = 343)
- Q29. How satisfied are you with the length of time it is taking for your accommodation to be put in place? (accommodation approved but partially or no in place, n = 338)

Challenges in the decision phase include delays and accommodations that are not fully or properly implemented; employees also cite negative supervisor attitudes while supervisors cite funding or procurement issues

Employee challenges or concerns about the decision and outcome phase

- Length of time to get accommodation and have it fully implemented from beginning to end.
- The attitude and behavior of managers. Many managers do not appreciate the importance of accommodation to employees who need them, and in some cases, went beyond a lack of support to actively attempting to impede or deny the request.
- Issues with adaptive equipment not being available or not functioning properly, including procurement delays and cases where nobody initiated the purchase.
- Need to request accommodation multiple times. Some employees had to have existing accommodations reapproved whenever their direct manager changed.

- Accommodation is not fully implemented or is ignored by management. Some say the accommodation was approved but is not always followed by managers.

Supervisor problems or challenges encountered in the implementation of approved accommodations

- The length of time to implement accommodation is a major challenge. Delays often involve the procurement process: finding and receiving the necessary equipment, waiting for approvals, and challenges with contractors installing them promptly and properly.
- Employee dissatisfaction with the accommodation. Some employees feel that the accommodation does not meet their needs, due to equipment not being what was originally requested or their accommodation involving a change in position or location.
- Balancing the accommodation with workplace operations. Some accommodations require reduced work hours or not performing tasks which are essential to the job itself, resulting in fewer workplace resources available to the manager.
- Funding: concerns about whether funding would be available to implement the accommodation and disagreements over who or which fund would pay for it.
- It is a cumbersome process. A lot of paperwork is involved to implement the accommodation and often lengthy IT and procurement processes are involved.

Source:

- Q33. What 1 or 2 challenges or concerns, if any, did you have (or are currently having) with the decision phase? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)
- Q20. What problems or challenges, if any, have you encountered in the implementation of approved accommodations? (supervisors who had a request approved, n=171)

Having an employee advocate for the accommodation process, better training for managers, improved procurement processes and a

centralized record of approved accommodations are common employee suggestions for improving outcomes

Employee suggestions for ways to improve the decision and outcome phase

- Provide better training for managers about the duty to accommodate, the accommodation process and sensitivity training.
- Set up a better procurement system for adaptive equipment to avoid delays and include a follow-up with the employee to ensure that it's working properly, and that the employee knows how to use it.
- Create a centralized file for information related to accommodations so employees don't have to request them multiple times if their job or manager changes.
- Provide a knowledgeable advocate in the accommodation process who can give advice and act as a go-between to support the employee and facilitate the process.
- Protect employees' private health information as much as possible by limiting the number of people who are involved in the process and by enforcing strict information management requirements ("need to know" basis).
- Make managers more accountable for the accommodation process to ensure that requests are handled in a reasonable time.

Source:

- Q34. What 1 or 2 things, if any, could have been done to improve the decision phase? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)

A third of supervisors don't feel they have what they need to effectively manage accommodation requests; a quarter do not feel supported by senior management

Table 16: Do you have what you need as a supervisor to effectively manage employee accommodation requests?

Do you have what you need as a supervisor to effectively manage employee accommodation requests?	All supervisors

Strongly agree	20%
Somewhat agree	46%
Somewhat disagree	21%
Strongly disagree	13%
I prefer not to answer	1%

Table 17: Degree of support from management when dealing with requests

Degree of support	Support from direct supervisor when dealing with requests	Support from senior management when dealing with requests
Very supported	52%	35%
Somewhat supported	33%	39%
Not very supported	10%	17%
Not at all supported	4%	6%
I prefer not to answer	2%	3%

Source:

- Q24. To what extent do you agree or disagree that you have what you need as a supervisor to effectively manage employee accommodation requests? (all supervisors, n=178)
- Q25. When dealing with employee accommodation requests, to what extent do you feel supported by your direct supervisor? (all supervisors, n=178)
- Q26. When dealing with employee accommodation requests, to what extent do you feel supported by your senior management? (all supervisors, n=178)

Supervisors would like more process information, a more centralized approach and greater access to experts and informational resources

Table 18. What other information, resources or support would help you navigate requests more effectively?

Theme	Quotations
Step by step instructions	<p>"There should be more step by step instructions for team leaders, managers and HR in order to streamline the process."</p> <p>"A step by step process document that is easy to follow and reduces unnecessary steps and approvals."</p>
Better access to experts	<p>"Someone knowledgeable on this topic with whom we could talk in person, instead of trying to navigate and interpret the various laws and policies."</p> <p>"I would like to have access to specialists such as an occupational therapist, mental health specialist, physiotherapist, etc. that can confirm the best approaches."</p>
More centralized approach	<p>"I think that a more centralized approach (...) would ensure uniformity."</p> <p>"There should be a specialist dealing with all accommodations. This would be more efficient because accommodation requests are relatively rare. Why should each team leader be forced to learn or re-learn all of the related HR procedures once every year or two?"</p>
More or better informational resources	<p>"A proper (departmental website) or portal that outlines the process, a properly staffed disability management unit where employees and supervisors can obtain responses in a timely manner."</p> <p>"Redo the TBS website and update the info on the Disability Management Tool and Managers and Employee Handbook tools on the website to reflect current information."</p>

Source:

- Q33. Is there any other information, resources or support you would like to have, or change you would like to see, to help you more effectively navigate the accommodation request process? (all supervisors, n=178)

Less than a third of employees are satisfied with the accommodation process overall

Table 19: Overall satisfaction with the accommodation process

Overall satisfaction with the accommodation process	Employees
Very satisfied	13%
Somewhat satisfied	18%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	9%
Somewhat dissatisfied	16%
Very dissatisfied	42%
I prefer not to answer	1%

Source:

- Q40. Looking back over the entire workplace accommodation request process, and setting aside the end result for a moment, how satisfied are you overall with the process you went through? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)

A large majority of employees and supervisors believe an “accommodation passport” would be very helpful

Table 20: How helpful the “accommodation passport” would be to people in your situation / for everyone?

How helpful the “accommodation passport” would be to people in your situation / for everyone?	Employees	Supervisors
Very helpful	73%	63%
Somewhat helpful	19%	27%
Not very helpful	3%	7%
Not at all helpful	3%	2%
I prefer not to answer	3%	2%

Source:

- Q50. The Government of Canada is exploring the possibility of an “accommodation passport” program that would allow employees who have an approved accommodation to transfer it to another federal department or position. Although such a program would not change the initial request approval process, it would eliminate the need to apply for the same accommodation multiple times. How helpful do you feel this would be to people in your situation? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)
- Q37. How helpful do you feel this (the “accommodation passport” program) would be in improving accommodation outcomes for everyone? (all supervisors, n=178)

Employees’ views about their future in the federal public service are connected to their experience with the accommodation process; optimism is strongest among employees with an approved accommodation fully in place

Table 21: Feelings about federal public service career (next 5 years)

Feelings about federal public service career (next 5 years)	Request approved and fully in place	Request approved and partially in place	Request denied
Positive	49%	33%	24%
Negative	30%	45%	53%

Table 22: Negative career effect due to health condition or disability

Negative career effect due to health condition or disability	Percentage saying yes	Most likely to say yes
Opted out of a staffing process	49%	Seeing disability (63%)
Denied promotional opportunity	41%	Cognitive disability (64%)
Feel underemployed or not challenged enough	54%	Sensory / environmental disability (72%)

Source:

- Q41. Overall, how do you feel about your career prospects with the Government of Canada over the next 5 years (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)
- Q43. Have you ever opted out of a staffing process because of workplace barriers or other considerations related to your chronic condition or disability? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)
- Q44. Do you feel you have ever been denied a promotional opportunity for a position you were qualified for because of reasons related to your chronic condition or disability? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)
- Q45. Do you feel that you are underemployed or are not being challenged enough in your current position, or could contribute more than your position? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)

Employees cite a variety of reasons for having positive or negative feelings about their future career prospects in the federal public service

Why employees feel positive about their future career prospects in the federal public service:

- Their accommodation has allowed them to recover or overcome some of the workplace barriers they were facing and to contribute fully to their team.
- They moved to a new office or department where management is more willing to provide accommodation that was unavailable at the previous position.
- Despite accommodation challenges, they are in a positive position due to their education, language skills, seniority and job performance relative to their peers.
- They work hard to overcome (or work around) the barriers they encounter and do not see it as a reason for negative career prospects.
- The expansion and normalization of telework among the public service at large has improved their career prospects.

Why employees feel neutral or negative about their future career prospects in the federal public service:

- Their condition or disability leads to them being perceived as a weaker candidate because accommodation is often required for the interview itself and many supervisors do not want to take on a team member who requires an accommodation.
- Their condition or disability limits an employee's ability to perform functions that would be required in other positions. Examples include those who may face more limited opportunities, including supervisory roles, because they need to telework.
- The need to go through the accommodation process again at a new position to get the accommodation that they have at their current position limits them.
- Concerns that supervisors will provide poor references due to their view of the employee as a "troublemaker" or would disclose the employee's condition or accommodation in a reference.
- Reasons unrelated to a condition or disability, including that there are few positions available in the employee's region, that the requirements for other positions are too difficult to meet, that the employee will be retiring soon and issues regarding the pay system.

Source:

- Q42. Briefly, please elaborate on why you feel this way about your career prospects. Sub-sample: Feel positive about Government of Canada career prospects (n=279)
- Q42. Briefly, please elaborate on why you feel this way about your career prospects. Sub-sample: Feel neutral or negative about career prospects (n=451)

Denied requests

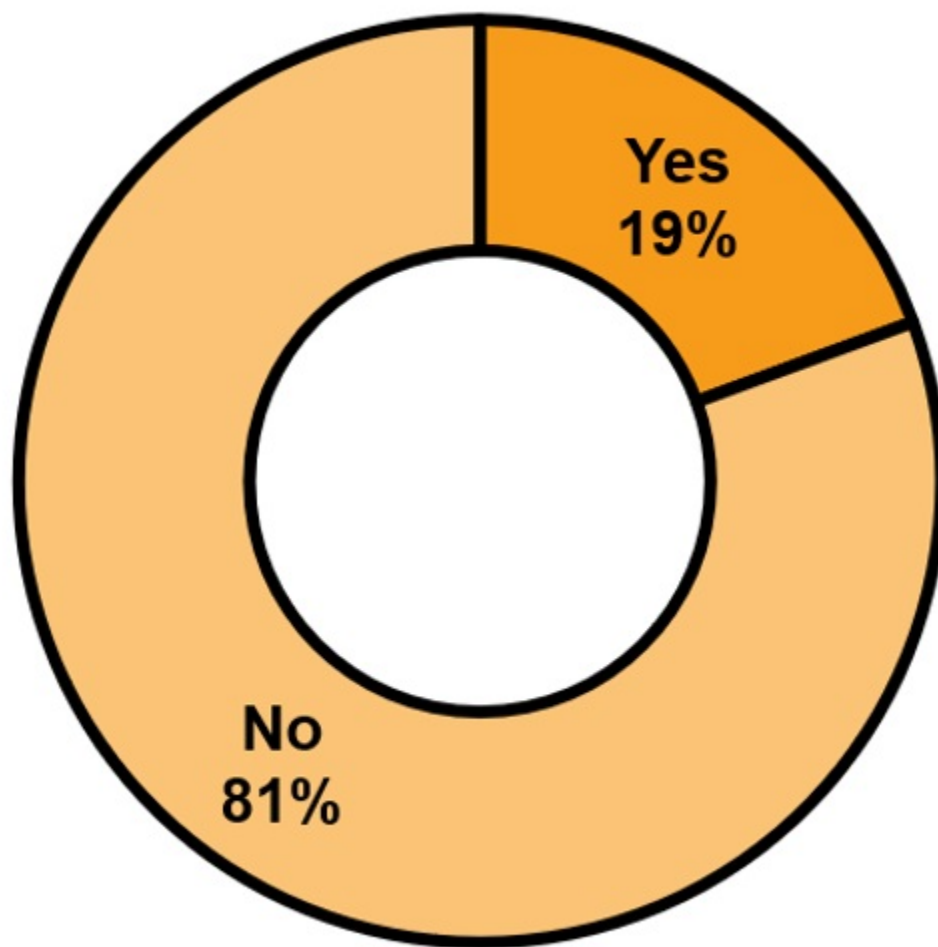
▼ In this section

- Among employees whose request was denied, eight in ten say they were not given enough explanation; most believe negative perceptions or lack of knowledge about their condition or disability played a role

- Common responses to a denied request are to look for a different job, retire early or “soldier on” despite the continued need for accommodation
- Four in ten have taken extended sick leave when their condition or disability was aggravated by not being appropriately accommodated; this skews higher among those whose accommodation was related to their mental health or other invisible disabilities
- Almost a quarter of employees who went on extended sick leave due to not being appropriately accommodated were away more than six months; less than one in five are satisfied with the level of support or accommodation received on their return
- Many requiring extended sick leave believe it would have been avoided if they had received proper accommodation in a timely manner
- Supervisors tend to see requests denied due to insufficient evidence of medical necessity or operational requirements that make them difficult to implement

Among employees whose request was denied, eight in ten say they were not given enough explanation; most believe negative perceptions or lack of knowledge about their condition or disability played a role

Figure 2: Given enough information explaining why request was denied



▼ Figure 2: Text version

Given enough information explaining why request was denied.

A doughnut chart showing the results

- yes 19%
- no 81%

Table 23: Perceived factors contributing to rejection of the accommodation request (top responses only)

Perceived factors contributing to rejection of the accommodation request (top responses only)	Those whose accommodation request was denied
Management had negative perceptions about my specific condition or disability	63%
A general lack of knowledge about my specific	63%

condition or disability	
Management was unwilling to vary policies	55%
Management was concerned it would establish a precedent	48%

Source:

- Q30. Do you feel you were given enough information that explained why your accommodation request was denied? (employees whose accommodation request was denied, n=62)
- Q31. In your opinion, do you feel that any of the following were factors in the rejection of your request? (employees whose accommodation request was denied, n=62) Note: respondents could choose multiple responses.

Common responses to a denied request are to look for a different job, retire early or “soldier on” despite the continued need for accommodation

Table 24. What did you do next after your request was denied?

Theme	Description
Find a new job or team	A common response is to move to another team within the public service or look for alternative employment outside of the public service. Some have already moved to another position and others are in the process of trying to do so.
Continue to work without the accommodation	Some employees without an accommodation have continued in their current position, to the best of their abilities, despite not being equipped to make their full contribution. Others say they have abandoned their request after weighing it against potential damage to their future career prospects.
Appeal or try again to get the accommodation	Some employees mention trying to get their accommodation by appealing to a disability champion or advisory committee, or through a complaint under the Canadian Human Rights Act.
Early retirement	Some employees intend to retire earlier than planned in order to avoid working without an accommodation.

Extended sick leave

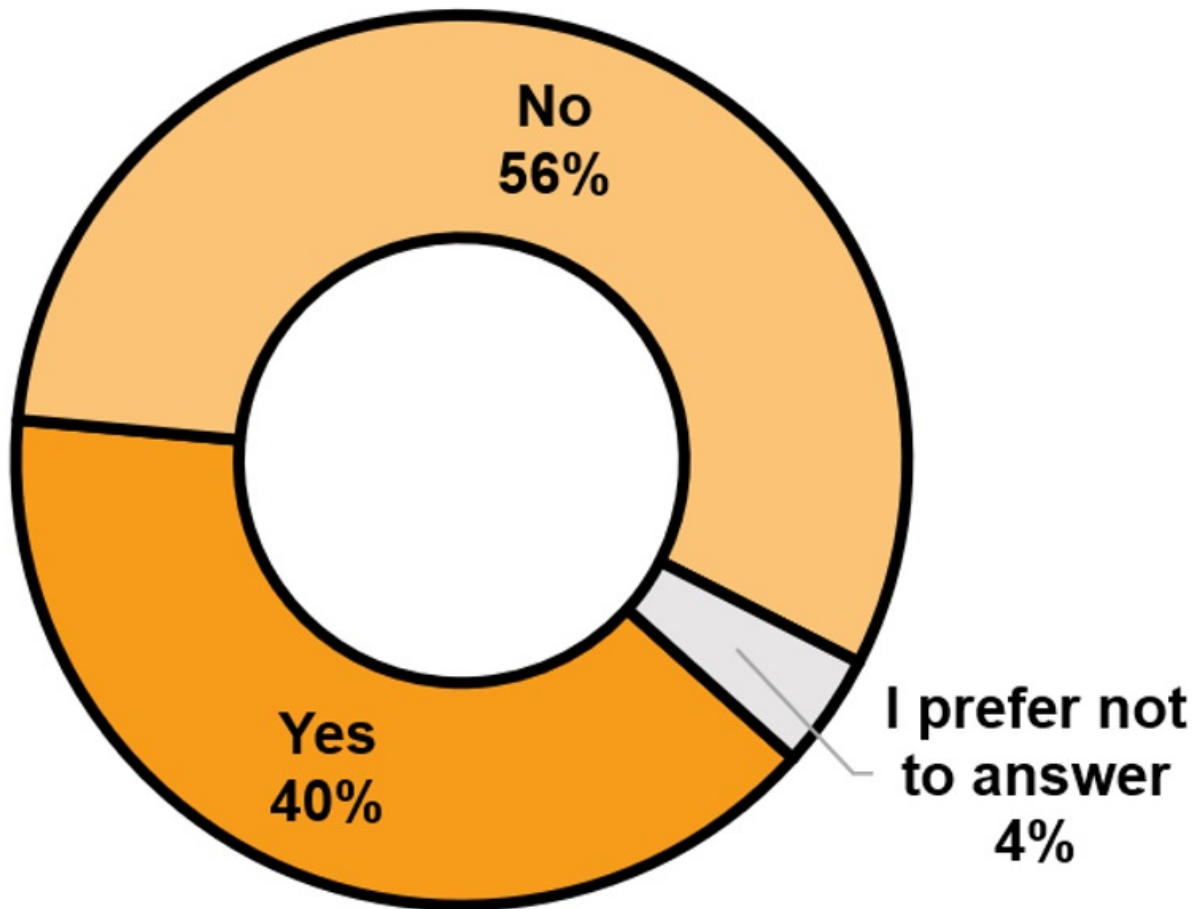
Other employees reported a need to take extended sick leave as a result of not being appropriately accommodated.

Source:

- Q32. Since your accommodation request was denied, what, if anything, do you plan to do next? (employees with a condition or disability request whose accommodation was denied, n=62)

Four in ten have taken extended sick leave when their condition or disability was aggravated by not being appropriately accommodated; this skews higher among those whose accommodation was related to their mental health or other invisible disabilities

Figure 3: Taken extended sick leave due to chronic condition or disability not being appropriately accommodated.



▼ **Figure 3: Text version**

Taken extended sick leave due to chronic condition or disability not being appropriately accommodated.

A doughnut chart showing the results

- yes 40%
- no 56%
- I prefer not to answer 4%

Table 25. Ever taken extended sick leave due to chronic condition not being appropriately accommodated by health condition or disability type

Health condition or disability type	Ever taken extended sick leave due to chronic condition not being appropriately accommodated?
Mental health issue	65%
Sensory/environmental disability	48%
Chronic health condition or pain	45%
Cognitive disability	38%
Issues with flexibility or dexterity	36%
Mobility issue	26%
Seeing disability	17%
Hearing disability	11%

Source:

- Q36. Have you ever taken extended sick leave due to a chronic condition or disability that was aggravated as a result of not being appropriately accommodated? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)

Almost a quarter of employees who went on extended sick leave due to not being appropriately accommodated were away more than six

months; less than one in five are satisfied with the level of support or accommodation received on their return

Table 26: Length of time on extended sick leave as a result of not being appropriately accommodated

Length of time on extended sick leave as a result of not being appropriately accommodated	Employees who have taken extended sick leave
Less than 1 month	27%
1 to 2 months	22%
3 to 6 months	20%
7 to 12 months	9%
13 to 18 months	5%
19 to 24 months	5%
More than 24 months	4%
I prefer not to answer	7%

Table 27: Satisfaction with level of support and/or accommodation when returning from leave

Satisfaction with level of support and/or accommodation when returning from leave	Employees who have taken extended sick leave
Very satisfied	6%
Somewhat satisfied	10%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	10%
Somewhat dissatisfied	15%
Very dissatisfied	53%
I prefer not to answer	6%

Source:

- Q38. How long were you on extended sick leave as a direct or indirect result of your chronic condition or disability not being appropriately accommodated? (employees who have taken extended sick leave, n=296)
- Q39. How satisfied are you with the level of support and/or accommodation you received when you returned to work after the extended sick leave? (employees who have taken extended sick leave, n=296)

Many requiring extended sick leave believe it would have been avoided if they had received proper accommodation in a timely manner

Table 28: What could have been done differently to avoid the extended sick leave?

Theme	Description
Being properly accommodated	Many of these employees mention that, if they had been properly accommodated, they would not have had to go on extended sick leave. They mention that, if their accommodation request had been handled proactively and within a reasonable amount of time, the leave could have been avoided.
Following doctor's recommendations	A common reason provided for the lack of accommodation was managers ignoring medical advice provided to employees leading up to the extended sick leave.
More support	A lack of support and understanding for employees was also mentioned as a contributing factor in taking extended sick leave, as this often exacerbated underlying issues.
Promoting better understanding of the process	A number of employees report being unaware of, or not knowledgeable enough about, the duty to accommodate and the options available to them before taking sick leave to have been able to avoid it.
Increased or improved support on returning from previous leave	Some employees report a lack of support and understanding when returning to work from an earlier extended sick leave, resulting in the situation worsening over time and requiring another extended leave.

Source:

- Q37. What, if anything, do you feel could have been done differently to avoid the need to take extended sick leave? (employees who have taken extended sick leave, n=296).

Supervisors tend to see requests denied due to insufficient evidence of medical necessity or operational requirements that make them difficult to implement**Table 29: Most common reasons why an accommodation request is denied**

Theme	Description
Lack of medical necessity for accommodation	A common reason for request denial is that the medical evidence provided by the employee did not adequately demonstrate that functional limitations exist or did not justify the requested accommodation.
Confusing a 'want' for a 'need'	Some supervisors explain that, since current guidelines indicate that accommodations must be based on functional limitations, denials occur when a request is perceived as a 'want' instead of a need.
Operational requirements or limitations	In some cases, supervisors perceive that it is not possible to accommodate the employee within their current position based on their functional limitations. This may be due to conflict with other requirements, core job functions or a belief that the accommodation would affect the organizational workflow too negatively.
Unwillingness to compromise or to accept alternate accommodations	In other cases, employees may be offered alternate accommodations or arrangements that are different from what was originally requested (including a change of position or location), which employees are often unwilling to accept.
Management concerns or perceptions	Some supervisors describe situations where employees were denied accommodations because of fear among management

that it would set a precedent or because they viewed the employee as a 'trouble employee.'

Source:

- Q23. In your experience, what are the 1 or 2 most common reasons why an accommodation request is denied? (supervisors who have had a request denied, n=51)

Key messages

▼ In this section

- The main message from employees to managers is to take accommodation requests seriously, trust employees and provide open communication.
- The main message from employees to their co-workers is that accommodations are a way of "levelling the playing field" and not a type of special treatment.
- The main messages from supervisors to senior management is to understand the level of effort involved in administering accommodation requests, to trust employees and show compassion, and to provide more training and support for supervisors.
- The main message from supervisors to employees seeking accommodation are to better understand what is eligible to be accommodated, their role and responsibilities in the process, and the fact that their preferred outcome is not guaranteed.

The main message from employees to managers is to take accommodation requests seriously, trust employees and provide open communication

Table 30: What would you most like your managers to know about

people in your situation to help them better support and enable you as an employee?

Theme	Description
Take accommodation requests seriously	Trust that employees genuinely need the accommodation to be able to contribute to their fullest potential. Do not view it as the employee's fault and understand that making the request is a difficult thing to do.
People with accommodations are not lazy or less capable	Do not judge people based on their limitations or see people who require accommodation as less able to perform their job-related duties. Recognize that employees want to contribute and are able to excel if provided with the support they require.
Show more empathy and openness	Show empathy and openness to the accommodation process. Understand the vulnerable position the employee is in when requesting it. Do not pre-judge specific types of conditions or disabilities; instead, try to learn more about them.
More open communication	Maintain an open, two-way dialogue with employees to understand their position. Continually update employees while a request is ongoing and check-in and follow-up regularly.
Understand invisible conditions and disabilities	Recognize that not all disabilities are visible and that, although a person may be smiling, it doesn't mean they are happy.

Source:

- Q48. What 1 or 2 key things would you most like your managers to know about people in your situation that would help them better support and enable you as an employee? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)

The main message from employees to their co-workers is that accommodations are a way of “levelling the playing field” and not a type of special treatment

Table 31: What would you most like your co-workers to know about people in your situation to help them better support and enable you as a valued team member?

Theme	Description
Accommodations are not an attempt to do less work	Recognize that the aim of accommodations is to make the employee a more productive worker, not to make their job easier. They are not special treatment or an advantage for people who do not have the same functional abilities, they provide the support required to enable the employee to contribute to the same degree as everyone else.
Be respectful	Treat employees with accommodations with respect. Do not discuss, comment or joke about someone's condition or accommodation. Be supportive and non-judgmental.
An accommodation does not mean someone is less capable	Recognize that the need for accommodations to perform their job-related duties doesn't make someone any less capable or skilled.
Understand invisible conditions and disabilities	Understand that a disability or condition may not always be visible to them, but that does not mean it is not present. Show understanding and patience.

Source:

- Q49. What 1 or 2 key things would you most like your co-workers to know about people in your situation that would help them better support you as a valued team member? (accommodation request related to a condition or disability, n=743)

The main messages from supervisors to senior management is to understand the level of effort involved in administering accommodation requests, to trust employees and show compassion, and to provide more training and support for supervisors

Table 32: What would you most like senior management to know about the accommodation process that would result in it working better for everyone?

Theme	Description
<p>Amount of time and effort required to navigate process</p>	<p>Understand how much time supervisors spend administering these requests. This goes along with expressing how complicated, cumbersome and time consuming the process for accommodation is and that there are ways in which it could be simplified.</p>
<p>Trust employees and show compassion</p>	<p>More trust and compassion should be shown toward employees. Many said their senior management feel that employees are looking for special treatment. Taking a more positive approach to accommodations would improve outcomes by giving employees the tools they need to succeed with less effort.</p>
<p>Play a larger role in accommodations</p>	<p>Play a larger role by providing: more guidance about what should and should not be covered in accommodations, having a centralized fund for accommodations, providing cross-department support or resources where it is necessary to find alternative positions for accommodated employees, and responding more promptly when their personal input is required for a request.</p>
<p>Training for supervisors</p>	<p>Training about accommodations should be provided for all supervisors who may have to handle requests when they start in their positions.</p>

Source:

- Q35. What 1 or 2 key things would you like senior management to know about the accommodation process that you feel would result in it working better for everyone? (all supervisors, n=178)

The main message from supervisors to employees seeking accommodation are to better understand what is eligible to be

accommodated, their role and responsibilities in the process, and the fact that their preferred outcome is not guaranteed

Table 33: What would you most like employees seeking accommodations to know about the process that would result in it working better for everyone?

Theme	Description
A better understanding that accommodations are meant to address a functional limitation	Understand that current guidelines require that an accommodation be demonstrably linked to a functional limitation. It would be helpful to provide employees who are considering a request with brief documents or videos explaining criteria for an accommodation.
Understand the process	Having a solid understanding of how the request process works is also beneficial so employees understand what their role and responsibilities are. Have a clear understanding of the purpose of medical documentation, so they can provide what their supervisor needs in order to approve the request.
Actively participate in the process	Supervisors and managers want to be open to, and actively collaborate with, employees to find a solution that is acceptable to both parties.
Employees are not guaranteed their preferred outcome	The outcome of the process could be different from what the employee preferred, and it may require a change in position or location. It is important that the employee know and understand in advance that this is a possibility.

Source:

- Q36. What 1 or 2 key things would you like employees who have (or are seeking) accommodations to know because you feel this knowledge would make the accommodation process work better for everyone? (all supervisors, n=178)

Observations and Conclusions

What did we learn? What can we explore further?	Evidence
<p>Employees experience fear and anxiety before making accommodation requests. They are concerned about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Damaging their reputation with fellow employees;• Experiencing reprisal from supervisors;• Hurting their career prospects in the public service;• Maintaining their privacy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When asked about their feelings before making the request, employees report negative emotions and raise these concerns as the reasons why (see Before making an accommodation request, employees are concerned that it will result in reprisal from supervisors and a damaged reputation; the inability to cope any longer leads employees to make the request).• Employees with a health condition or disability who have made an accommodation request report experiencing discrimination and harassment more often than employees with disabilities in general reported in the PSES. They believe that their condition or disability is connected to the harassment and discrimination in a large majority of cases (tables 6 and 7).• More than four in ten have previously chosen not to request an accommodation that would have improved their ability to contribute on the job; the reasons often include concerns about management or supervisor perceptions and career implications (tables 8 and 9).• Employees perceive the need for an advocate to help them navigate the process and act on their behalf with unsupportive or adversarial managers (see Employees further suggest that assistance for those making an accommodation request and more understanding from managers are required; see Having an employee advocate for the accommodation process, better training for managers, improved procurement processes and a centralized record of approved accommodations are common employee suggestions for improving outcomes).

Many supervisors say they lack experience and knowledge about the accommodation process and request more training and resources for navigating the process, including a more consistent or centralized accommodation process, step-by-step instructions and greater access to information and functional experts.

- A majority of supervisors have handled an average of one request per year or fewer (tables [4](#) and [5](#)).
- Many supervisors say they do not find the accommodation process clear (37%) or that it lacks clarity on who to contact for assistance (32%) (tables [10](#) and [11](#)). When asked how the process could be made clearer, supervisors suggest resources that outline how the process works, a better organization of existing resources and more training on how to handle requests (see [Supervisor suggestions on how to improve the process include step-by-step resources, better training on accommodation requests and standardized procedures across departments](#)).
- Many employees cite their supervisor's lack of knowledge and understanding about the accommodation process as a challenge when making an accommodation request (see [Employees cited fear of negative perceptions and career effects, lack of supervisor knowledge, absence of a supportive environment and a time-consuming process as key challenges](#)) and suggest better supervisor training as a solution (see [Having an employee advocate for the accommodation process, better training for managers, improved procurement processes and a centralized record of approved accommodations are common employee suggestions for improving outcomes](#)).
- A key supervisor message for senior management is that they should receive more guidance and that better training should be provided ([table 32](#)).

Supervisors lack the resources and support from functional experts they need to handle accommodation requests in the

- When supervisors are asked about what challenges they face during the process, they mention a need for more 'hands-on' assistance from functional experts (see [Supervisors emphasized the need for training and support, clarity around medical evidence and a simplified procurement process](#)).

most efficient and effective way.

- A third of supervisors (34%) disagree that they have what they need to effectively manage accommodation requests (tables [16](#) and [17](#)). When asked what resources would help them successfully navigate accommodation requests, suggestions include greater access to experts and better informational resources ([table 18](#)).
- Key messages from supervisors for senior management is to understand how time and resource intensive the process is for supervisors, and that senior management should trust employees, show compassion and play a larger role by providing more guidance and responding more promptly when their personal input is required for a request ([table 32](#)).

Both employees and supervisors feel the accommodation process needs to be streamlined in order to speed up the process.

- Employees cite the cumbersome nature of the process as a reason for being reluctant to make a request and they suggest a clearer and simpler process to make it easier to request an accommodation (see [Employees cited fear of negative perceptions and career effects, lack of supervisor knowledge, absence of a supportive environment and a time-consuming process as key challenges](#)).
- Employee dissatisfaction with the amount of time required to get an accommodation is high (40% where accommodation is in place, 71% where it is not) ([table 15](#)).
- Both employees and supervisors (see [More than three quarters of employees required a medical certificate or other evidence; the proportion was significantly higher for those with invisible disabilities \(83%\) as compared to visible disabilities \(67%\). Clarifying the information requirements would avoid repeated trips to specialists and would speed up the process; see Both employees and managers suggest streamlining the assessment process and clarifying the information requirements; see Supervisors emphasized the need for training and](#)

support, clarity around medical evidence and a simplified procurement process; and table 32)

commonly say that minimizing or eliminating requests for evidence would streamline the process significantly.

- Supervisors describe 'red tape', multiple approvals needed, issues with procurement processes and installation as challenges throughout the process. They suggest a more streamlined and simplified approach, especially for acquiring adaptive devices (see Both employees and managers suggest streamlining the assessment process and clarifying the information requirements; see Supervisors emphasized the need for training and support, clarity around medical evidence and a simplified procurement process; and see Challenges in the decision phase include delays and accommodations that are not fully or properly implemented; employees also cite negative supervisor attitudes while supervisors cite funding or procurement issues).
- Employees and supervisors say current assessment forms and processes are too complex and do not generate the information required from specialists (see Employees cited fear of negative perceptions and career effects, lack of supervisor knowledge, absence of a supportive environment and a time-consuming process as key challenges; see More than three quarters of employees required a medical certificate or other evidence; the proportion was significantly higher for those with invisible disabilities (83%) as compared to visible disabilities (67%). Clarifying the information requirements would avoid repeated trips to specialists and would speed up the process). Supervisors suggest simplifying the Occupational Fitness Assessment Form (OFAF) (see Both employees and managers suggest streamlining the assessment process and clarifying the information requirements).

There is an impression that that the accommodation request process is adversarial and that attitudes toward those who make accommodation requests are negative. This can result in a less favourable environment for ensuring employees are properly accommodated.

- Employees cite unsupportive supervisors who need to be convinced that the accommodation is necessary as a major challenge (see [Employees cited fear of negative perceptions and career effects, lack of supervisor knowledge, absence of a supportive environment and a time-consuming process as key challenges](#)). More supportive, empathetic, open and accepting attitudes from supervisors would lessen these challenges. Having their supervisor ignore or doubt medical evidence is also an issue for some employees (see [More than three quarters of employees required a medical certificate or other evidence; the proportion was significantly higher for those with invisible disabilities \(83%\) as compared to visible disabilities \(67%\). Clarifying the information requirements would avoid repeated trips to specialists and would speed up the process](#)).
- Employees feel that supervisors need to take requests seriously, trust that employees genuinely need the accommodation and not view the situation as the employee's fault ([table 30](#)). They also feel supervisors should not act like the accommodation request is a burden to them (see [Employees further suggest that assistance for those making an accommodation request and more understanding from managers are required](#)).
- A shift in perspective among some supervisors may be necessary to ensure they do not judge employees based on their limitations or see people who require accommodation as less able to perform their duties. It should be stressed that employees who request accommodation want to contribute and are able to excel if provided the support they require ([table 30](#)).
- Many supervisors agree, saying that more trust should be shown to employees around their needs for accommodation and question the need to provide evidence (see [Both employees and managers suggest](#)

streamlining the assessment process and clarifying the information requirements).

A significant barrier identified by many employees is the need to make multiple requests or repeatedly submit medical certificates and/or other evidence for the same accommodation due to a change in their position, physical office or supervisor.

- Both employees and supervisors recommend the creation of a centralized file for information related to accommodations to avoid this situation (see Having an employee advocate for the accommodation process, better training for managers, improved procurement processes and a centralized record of approved accommodations are common employee suggestions for improving outcomes; and table 18).
- Support for the proposed “accommodation passport”, which would streamline the process and document historical accommodations, thereby facilitating the transfer of employees’ approved accommodations to another department or position, is very high among both employees and supervisors (table 20).

An accommodation request process that is handled more centrally and less directly by supervisors is a common suggestion among both employees and supervisors. This type of approach could address numerous issues, help to streamline the process and result in better outcomes.

- Employees say a more impartial, arms-length process that relies less on supervisors would address concerns about a lack of supervisor experience and knowledge about accommodation, better protect personal health information, avoid potential reprisal from supervisors and alleviate concerns that supervisors and Labour Relations only work in management's interest (see Employees cited fear of negative perceptions and career effects, lack of supervisor knowledge, absence of a supportive environment and a time-consuming process as key challenges).
- As most supervisors are not specialists in accommodations, a more centralized system would involve functional experts more in the process and take advantage of their expertise (table 18).
- A centralized system could also involve centralized funding, which would eliminate concerns about the cost to departmental budgets for accommodations (see Challenges in the decision phase include delays and accommodations that are not fully or properly

implemented; employees also cite negative supervisor attitudes while supervisors cite funding or procurement issues).

- A centralized approach would also increase consistency across departments (see Supervisor suggestions on how to improve the process include step-by-step resources, better training on accommodation requests and standardized procedures across departments; see Both employees and managers suggest streamlining the assessment process and clarifying the information requirements).

Not properly accommodating employees leads to negative outcomes such as employees leaving their position, leaving the public service altogether, retiring early, taking extended sick leaves and being unable to contribute to their full potential.

- In instances where accommodation requests are denied, employees often feel they must choose between moving positions, leaving the public service, retiring earlier than planned, going on extended leave or carrying on working at a diminished capacity (table 24).
- Four in ten employees say they have taken extended sick leave as a result of not being appropriately accommodated. This is especially common among those with mental health issues (figure 3 and table 25).
- Almost a quarter of employees who went on extended sick leave due to a lack of appropriate accommodation were away for more than six months (table 26 and 27).
- Less than one in five employees who went on extended sick leave are satisfied with the level of support or accommodation they received when they returned, leaving open the possibility they may need to take leave again in the future (table 26 and 27).
- Many employees who have taken extended leave say it could have been avoided if they had been properly accommodated (table 28).

Employees' view about their future career prospects in the Government of

- Four in ten employees are negative about their career prospects over the next five years. They cite concerns about being viewed as a poor candidate in the selection process or that moving positions would mean re-

Canada are connected to their experience with the accommodation process.

requesting (and possibly jeopardizing) their accommodation (see [Employees cite a variety of reasons for having positive or negative feelings about their future career prospects in the federal public service](#)).

- Many (49%) report having opted out of a staffing process because of barriers related to their health condition or disability, a substantial number (41%) feel they have been denied a promotional opportunity due to reasons related to their condition or disability, and more than half (54%) feel underemployed or not challenged enough (tables [21](#) and [22](#)).
- Optimism about their federal government career is strongest among employees with an approved accommodation fully in place (tables [21](#) and [22](#)).

There is some evidence that employees with conditions or disabilities that are more readily recognizable to outside observers, such as seeing, flexibility/dexterity and mobility disabilities, tend to have more successful accommodation experiences.

- Employees with seeing, flexibility/dexterity and mobility-related disabilities are more likely to have their accommodation request approved ([table 14](#)), are more satisfied with the process overall and have the most positive views about their career prospects.
- Those whose conditions or disabilities are less easily recognizable to outside observers, such as mental health issues and sensory / environmental disabilities, are more likely to be dissatisfied with the accommodation process, and employees who have mental health issues are the least likely to have their request approved ([table 14](#)).
- More than half of supervisors agree that invisible conditions make the assessment process more complex, mainly due to the need for additional evidence and/or formal assessment by an external doctor or specialist, and assessments not calibrated to the circumstances of the accommodation request (tables [12](#), [13](#), [18](#) and see [Both employees and managers suggest streamlining the assessment process and clarifying the information requirements](#)).

It is unclear whether increased evidence requirements and/or increased

complexity in the assessment process contributes to the more negative experiences reported by employees with conditions or disabilities that are less easily recognizable to outside observers.

Annex: Key Definitions

Definitions as presented in the 2019 Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) and referenced in this survey are:

Harassment

Any improper conduct by an individual that is directed at and offensive to another individual in the workplace, including at any event or any location related to work, and that the individual knew or ought reasonably to have known would cause offence or harm. It comprises objectionable act(s), comment(s) or display(s) that demean, belittle or cause personal humiliation or embarrassment, and any act of intimidation or threat. It also includes harassment within the meaning of the Canadian Human Rights Act (that is, based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identify or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics (including a requirement to undergo a genetic test, or disclose the results of a genetic test), disability or conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered). Harassment is normally a series of incidents, but it can be one severe incident that has a lasting impact on the individual.

Discrimination

Treating someone differently or unfairly because of a personal characteristic or distinction, which, whether intentional or not, has an effect that imposes disadvantages not imposed on others or that withholds or limits access that is given to others. There are 13 prohibited grounds of discrimination under the Canadian Human Rights Act (that is, based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics (including a requirement to undergo a genetic test, or disclose the results of a genetic test), disability or conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered).

Footnotes

*

See Annex for definitions of harassment and discrimination, according to the Public Service Employee Survey (PSES).

**

2019 PSES results for people with disabilities:

- Victim of harassment: 29%
- Victim of discrimination: 23%

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