

Summary of Results: Aerospace Medical Certification Services – Airman Satisfaction Survey 2021

Kylie Key¹, Casey Yetter², Suzanne Thomas²

¹ Civil Aerospace Medical Institute, Federal Aviation Administration, Oklahoma City, OK 73125

² Cherokee Nation Support, Services, & Solutions, Oklahoma City, OK 73125

The Civil Aerospace Medical Institute (CAMI) of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has surveyed pilots who recently sought medical certification every approximately two years since 2006. The survey examines satisfaction with Aerospace Medical Certification Services (AMCS) provided by Aviation Medical Examiners (AME), FAA Regional Flight Surgeons (RFS), and the FAA Aerospace Medical Certification Division (AMCD) in Oklahoma City. Each survey aims to evaluate the degree of customer satisfaction with AMCS, identify areas in which the FAA may improve these services, and assess change in customer satisfaction because of improvements from previous iterations of the process. The 2021 survey included additional items to assess the costs of obtaining a medical certificate and additional tests, asked for suggestions for making medical certification easier, and included additional demographic items to gather age data and information on flight hours in the last year and overall.

The Office of Aerospace Medicine (OAM) use survey results to improve the process by which pilots apply and are evaluated for medical certificates to receive their license to fly. Administration of the survey meets federal requirements set forth initially by Executive Order No. 12862, “Setting Customer Service Standards,” and the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993. The purpose of this report is to communicate a brief overview of the results of the 2021 AMCS survey, to inform how medical certification processes may be improved.

An invitation to complete the survey was distributed via email to a sample of pilots who sought medical certification for Class I, II, and III within the 24 months leading up to the survey ($N=10,927$ [2018]; $N=10,793$ [2021]). Some Class III pilots indicated that they used BasicMed to apply for their most recent medical certification. The *FAA Extension, Safety, Security Act of 2016* (FESSA) included BasicMed as relief for pilots to fly without going through medical certification if they meet certain requirements. This program is not in the purview of the AMCS; therefore, those results are not included in this report.

Airmen were offered the option to either complete the survey online via the Internet using a computer or mobile device, or to request a paper survey to complete and return via US Postal mail. Invitees were informed that completion of the survey, or any part of the survey, was voluntary.

All steps in the process of obtaining a medical certificate were evaluated, including filing an application on MedXPress (the system in which anyone requiring an FAA Medical Clearance or Medical Certificate can electronically complete the FAA forms), AME services, medical examination appointments, and FAA medical representative services (see Table 1). Satisfaction

ratings for MedXPress were collected only if the respondent reported using the service to submit their application.

Overall, 5,162 invitees responded to the survey. Of those, 215 opted out and 4,947 (45.9%) provided responses to the survey. There were 4,858 respondents who sought a Class I, Class II, or Class III medical certificate in the 24 months prior to the survey and the remainder used BasicMed to apply for their medical certification.

Pilots indicated that their level of satisfaction towards services and support by responding to items using a 5-item scale ranging from (1) very dissatisfied to (5) very satisfied. Pilots also provided responses to open-response questions, where prompted. Responses were self-paced, and the survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Pilot satisfaction with certification and support services was examined for the 24-month period prior to participation.

Satisfaction ratings between the years 2018 and 2021 are presented in Table 1. Overall, satisfaction with medical certification services remained high with minimal fluctuation between 2018 and 2021. Satisfaction with AME services and exam appointments held steady between 2018 and 2021, while satisfaction with the performance of MedXPress and the FAA medical representative services decreased.

Table 1

Overall Satisfaction

2018	2021		2018	2021	Change
<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	Services and Support	%	%	%
4,706	4,489	AME Services	87.6	88.1	0.5
4,705	4,492	Exam Appointment	84.6	85.2	0.6
4,413	4,232	Performance of MedXPress*	73.0	71.2	-1.8
1,328	1,264	FAA medical representative services**	35.7	30.2	-5.5
Average Satisfaction			70.2	68.7	-1.6

*Note. *Respondents were included only if they indicated they used MedXPress to submit their application. **Respondents were included only if they indicated they had contact with an FAA medical representative.*

Respondents reported the costs associated with obtaining their medical certification. Most respondents (68.7%, $n=4,834$) reported spending between \$100 and \$200 for their medical examination (excluding additional testing) with 85% ($n=4,821$) paying out of pocket. Additionally, 16.7% of those who sought additional required testing reported spending more than \$1,000 ($M=\$7,331.86$, $SD=\$22,033.33$).

AMEs identified or alerted 11.5% of pilots to new medical conditions and of those, 42.8% required treatment for their medical certification. Additionally, AMEs identified or alerted 14.9% of pilots to preexisting health conditions that required treatment to obtain their medical certification. Of those, 88.1% of pilots received treatment for their preexisting health condition. When asked about previous medical certification exams, 10.4% of pilots reported that their AME alerted them to new medical conditions and of those, 45.6% required treatment for medical

certification. Additionally, 13.6% of pilots reported that in previous medical certification exams, their AME alerted them to preexisting health conditions that required treatment to obtain their medical certification and of those, 91% received treatment.

When comparing respondents who needed a special issuance to those that did not, 54% of those without special issuances reported ‘none or not applicable’ when asked about costs of additional requirements, whereas only 16.7% of the special issuance group reported no additional expenses. Conversely, 30.9% of the special issuance group reported additional requirement costs totaling more than \$1,000 whereas only 12.9% of those without a special issuance reported spending more than \$1,000 on additional requirements.

Respondents who indicated dissatisfaction with the quality of service provided by FAA medical representatives were asked to explain the reason behind their decision. Of the 578 respondents who answered, 27.9% were dissatisfied because their medical certificates were denied, 60.2% were dissatisfied because of the poor communication on where their application was in the review process, and 68.7% were dissatisfied because the FAA took too long to complete the review of their medical certificate. However, many airmen (58.3%) seeking medical certificates received their certification on the same day as their exam appointment.

The quality of services item allowed respondents to select multiple responses; therefore, the percentage is based on the number of respondents to the item. Other responses and a comparison to 2018 results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Dissatisfaction with quality of services responses

2018	2021		2018	2021	Change
<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>		%	%	%
196	161	Denied my medical certificate	34.6	27.9	-6.8
57	57	Not treated with courtesy and respect	10.1	9.9	-0.2
198	193	Not adequately informed of requirements for additional documents	35.0	33.4	-1.6
179	180	Failed to explain requirements for additional documentation	31.6	31.1	-0.5
202	225	Not informed of status of application	35.7	38.9	3.2
289	348	Poor communication on where application was in the review process	51.1	60.2	9.1
357	397	Took too long to complete the review	63.1	68.7	5.6
240	273	Other reason(s)	42.4	47.2	4.8

Note. n may sum to greater than the number of respondents to the item due to them providing multiple responses. The % of respondents is based on the total number of respondents to the item.

Airmen thought the FAA medical certification process ensured the safety of the National Airspace System (NAS) to a great extent (25.6%), to a considerable extent (35.6%), to a moderate extent (19.6%), to a limited extent (15.1%), and not at all (4.1%).

A primary opportunity for improvement lies with improving the communication of requirements, expectations, and status of their medical certificates. When asked how the FAA could make the certification process easier, respondents expressed the desire to be able to track the status of their medical certificates (55.6%), to be provided with a list of approved medications (39.3%), and to be able to attach supporting documents in MedXPress (46.8%). The next round of AMCS surveys will be administered digitally in the Fall of 2023.

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If you would like to discuss findings and implications, please contact the FAA's Principal Investigator, Dr. Kylie Key (kylie.n.key@faa.gov). As a reminder, responses are confidential and kept private to the extent provided by law. FAA researchers do not know which responses are associated with which airman.

References

Federal Aviation Administration (2023). BasicMed. Retrieved July 6, 2023 from https://www.faa.gov/licenses_certificates/airmen_certification/basic_med