



## What is The *Rehabilitation Act*?

The *Rehabilitation Act* is a United States federal law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. First passed by Congress in 1973, the *Rehabilitation Act* has been amended several times. Its purpose is to ensure equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities in various aspects of life, including employment, education, and access to public services.

The *Rehabilitation Act* covers a wide range of provisions, but here are some key sections:

1. Section 501: This section prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in federal government employment. It requires federal agencies to take affirmative action to hire, retain, and promote individuals with disabilities.
2. Section 503: This section applies to federal government contractors and requires them to take positive action to employ individuals with disabilities. It sets a goal for federal contractors to ensure that at least 7% of their workforce consists of individuals with disabilities.
3. Section 504: This section is one of the most significant provisions of the act. It prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal funding. This includes schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, and other entities that receive federal financial assistance. Section 504 requires these programs to provide reasonable accommodations to ensure equal access for individuals with disabilities.
4. Section 508: This section requires federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology accessible to individuals with disabilities. It ensures that individuals with disabilities can access and use information technology, such as computers, websites, and software, that is used by the federal government.

5. Section 501 and 504: In addition, these sections also prohibit disability-based discrimination by recipients of federal financial assistance, such as state and local governments, hospitals, and nonprofit organizations.

The *Rehabilitation Act* has played a crucial role in advancing the rights of individuals with disabilities in the United States. It laid the foundation for subsequent disability rights legislation, such as the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990*.

## How is disability defined under the Rehabilitation Act?

The *Rehabilitation Act* defines disability as an impairment, physical or mental, that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Major life activities include walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, and caring for oneself.

The definition of disability under the act is broad and inclusive to cover a wide range of impairments. It encompasses both physical and mental impairments, including but not limited to conditions such as mobility impairments, visual impairments, hearing impairments, cognitive impairments, mental health conditions, and chronic illnesses.

The definition of disability under the act does not include specific lists of impairments. Instead, it focuses on the impact of the impairment on major life activities. This approach allows for flexibility and ensures that individuals with various types of disabilities are protected against discrimination.

The definition of disability may vary slightly depending on the specific section of the *Rehabilitation Act* being referred to, as different sections may have additional requirements or specifications. However, the core meaning of disability as an impairment that substantially limits major life activities remains consistent throughout the Act.

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