

To: Vermont Legislature
From: Michael Harrington, Labor Commissioner
Date: September 22, 2020
Subject: Unemployment Insurance Weekly Update

This report includes both new and continuing efforts. New information is in RED.

Lost Wage Assistance Program (LWA)

- Regular UI claimants have continued to submit their responses to the self-attestation question required under the LWA program. We will continue to issue payments regularly as claimants complete the attestation. Eligible claimants will receive \$300 for each week in which they are eligible. Claimants who do not have internet access but need to complete the attestation should contact the UI Call Center at 1-877-214-3332. More information about the LWA program can be found online at: <https://labor.vermont.gov/unemployment-insurance/lost-wage-assistance-program>.
- The first round of LWA payments were issued to eligible claimants on Friday, September 18 in the form of a paper check mailed to the address provided on their claim. Most claimants will receive those payments mid-week this week. In total 25,000 payments went out the door last week in the amount of \$21,000,000. Rolling payments will continue to be made as people certify and become eligible for the LWA benefit.
- We have submitted and received approval on our second FEMA application for the Lost Wage Assistance program to provide the LWA supplemental benefit to eligible claimants for an additional three weeks (weeks ending August 22, August 29, and September 5). FEMA has informed all states that there will not be funding available beyond week six (week ending September 5).

Unemployment Extended Benefits

- The Department has implemented the high Extended Benefits program which will provide an additional 20 weeks of benefits to eligible UI claimants, but only after regular UI and PEUC benefits are exhausted.
- The monthly Labor Market Information jobs data and press release was published on Friday, September 18 showing Vermont's unemployment rate fell to 4.8% for the month of August. While this is preliminary data, it illustrates the challenge of accurate data collection during a national health emergency. The drastic shift in the unemployment rate, as well as the total labor force number, are directly related to the household employment survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, which asks individuals 1) if they have been actively looking for work AND 2) if they are able to accept work if offered. During COVID-19 there are a number of legitimate reasons for an individual to not work or look for work and still receive unemployment benefits; however, the household survey does not consider the broadening of the unemployment eligibility requirements, nor the number of individuals receiving benefits during COVID, when it calculates these numbers. Because of this, Vermont's unemployment rate dropped significantly last month; however, the number of Vermonters receiving unemployment benefits remains extremely high. Based on the number of claimants filing for benefits, it is likely that Vermont's actual unemployment rate is somewhere between 8%-10%.

Claim Issues

- Claimants that contact the Claimant Assistance Center with an issue that cannot be resolved within 24-hours will be moved to the Inquiry Tool and a specialist will be assigned to their case for expedited resolution. The Claimant Assistance Center can be reached at 877-214-3332.

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- As we approach our “busy season” with regular seasonal layoffs, we are tailoring messaging specific to claimants who will likely need to reopen their claim (rather than reapply), which will mitigate the number of claim issues and hopefully expedite processing. The pre-COVID high unemployment season typically begins in November and runs through March each year.

UI Fraud

- Individuals who believe a fraudulent claim has been filed using their personal information should notify the Department of Labor at 802-828-4101. This line is exclusively for fraud reports. More information about fraud and the ability to submit online reports is available at: <https://labor.vermont.gov/ui-fraud>.

Claims Adjudications and Appeals

- Our team of factfinders has launched successfully. This effort is designed to expedite the adjudications process by increasing the speed in which claim determinations can be made. Additionally, the Department has hired more staff in both the adjudications and appeals units to accelerate the processing of contested claims.

Reimbursable Employer Charge Relief

- The Department has begun to reimburse employers who are classified as ‘Reimbursable,’ and who had already paid the full contribution amount for the second quarter filing.

(Appendix Below)

APPENDIX

Popular Links:

- [Click here for PUA general information](#)
- [Click here for PUA FAQs](#)
- [Click here for PUA application video demonstration](#)
- [Click here for unemployment general information](#)
- [Click here for frequently asked questions](#)
- [Click here for Return to Work Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Traditional Unemployment Insurance (TUI)

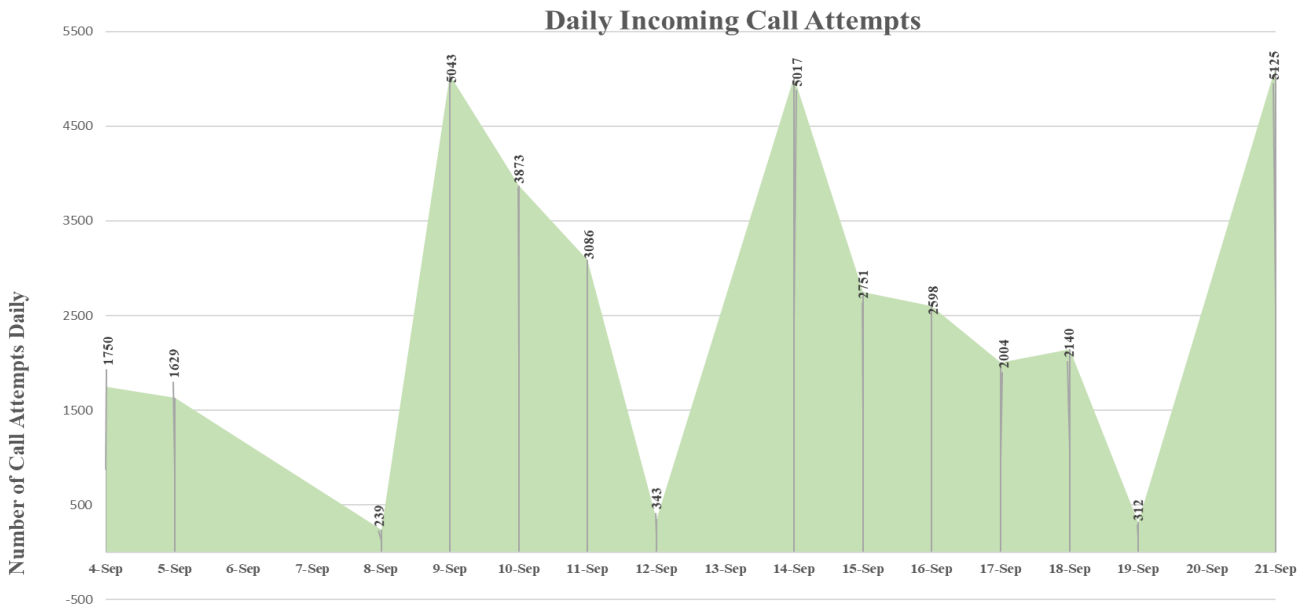
*Numbers as of Tuesday, September 22, 2020		
Total Initial Claimants Filed	120,753	Total Number of Initial Claimants.
Initial Claimants Eligible for UI	81,217	Number of claimants eligible for UI.
Initial Claimants Eligible for UI - Paid	74,016	Number of claimants who are receiving, or have received, UI benefits.
Initial Claimants Eligible for UI - Not Paid	7,201	Number of claimants who meet basic eligibility thresholds, and who either have issues on their claim or are no longer filing.
UI Trust Fund Balance	\$264,016,653	Trust Fund balance can fluctuate due to benefit payments, earned interest, employer contributions, and federal reimbursements. (Note: Balance as of 3/1/2020 \$506,157,247)

Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA)

*Numbers as of Tuesday, September 22, 2020		
Claimants Potentially PUA Eligible	30,922	Total number of claimants that could complete the PUA application and are in the system
Claimants in PUA – Filed	23,373	# of claimants who have completed the PUA application
Claimants in PUA – Filed & Eligible	19,413	# of eligible claimants
Claimants in PUA – Filed & Ineligible	3,910	# of ineligible claimants
Claimants Eligible for PUA - Filed and Paid	18,392	# of eligible claimants receiving PUA benefit.
Claimants in PUA -Filed and Not Paid	1,021	# of claimants that have a payment pending, issue on weekly claim to resolve, or have returned to work and are not filing.
Total PUA Benefits Dispersed	\$198,321,566	Total amount of PUA benefits paid

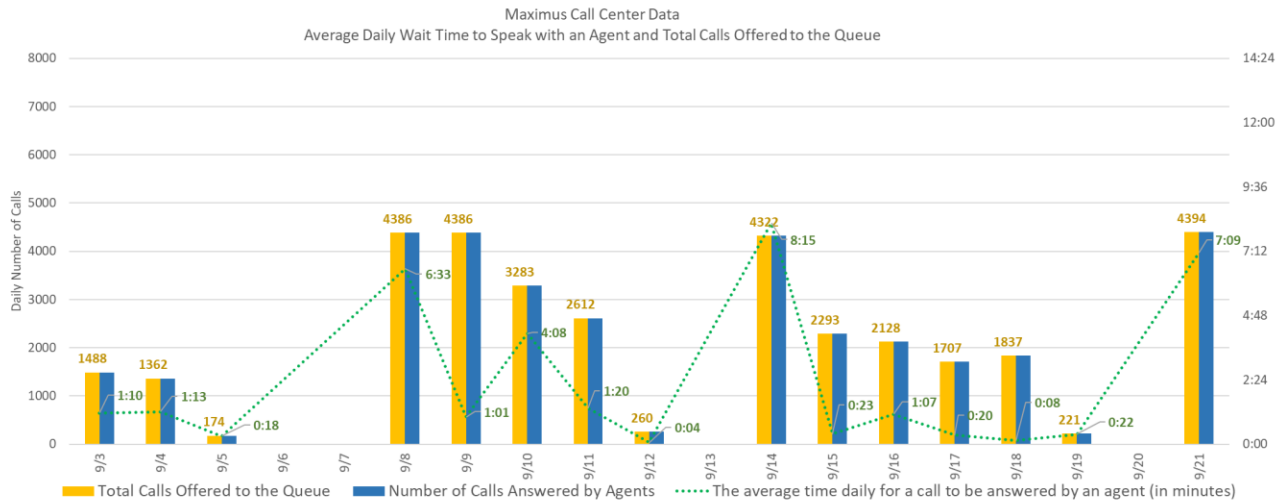
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Figure 1.1



*Counts include both answered and unanswered calls, multiple attempts from the same phone number and calls terminated by caller in the automated interactive voice response system

Figure 1.2



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Figure 2.1

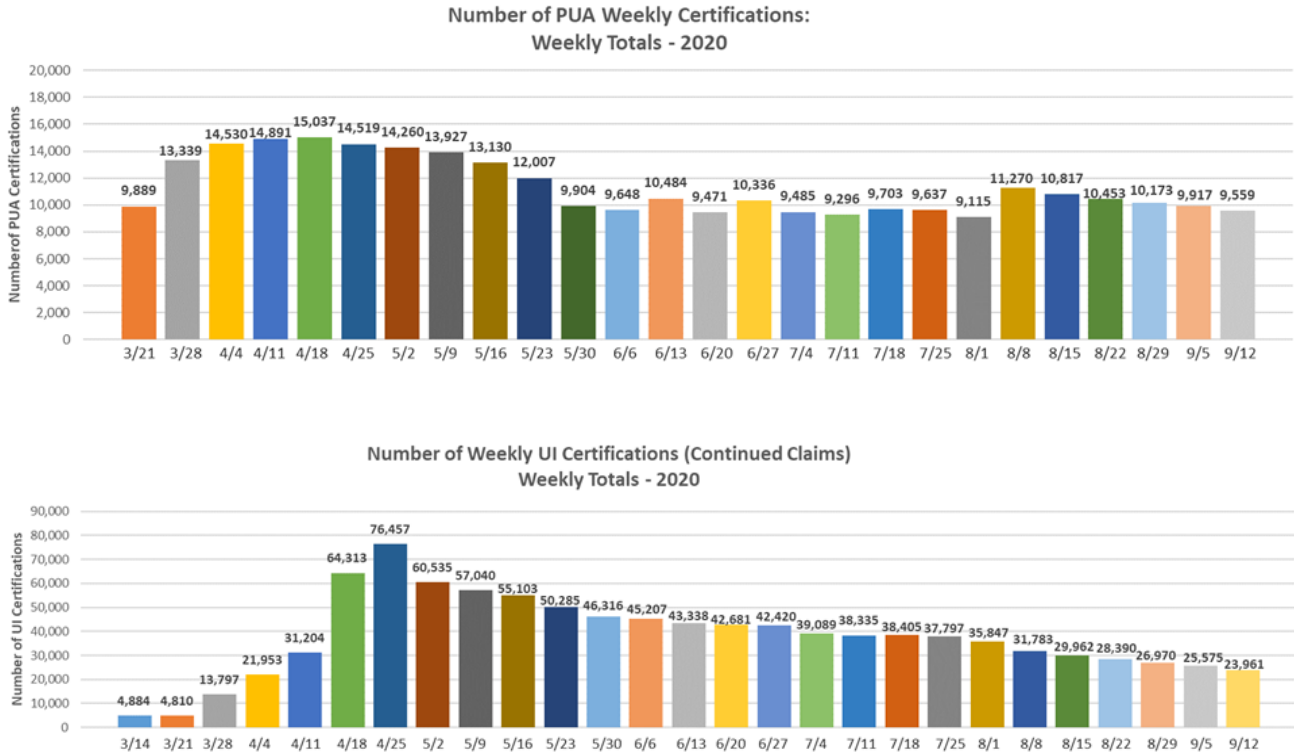
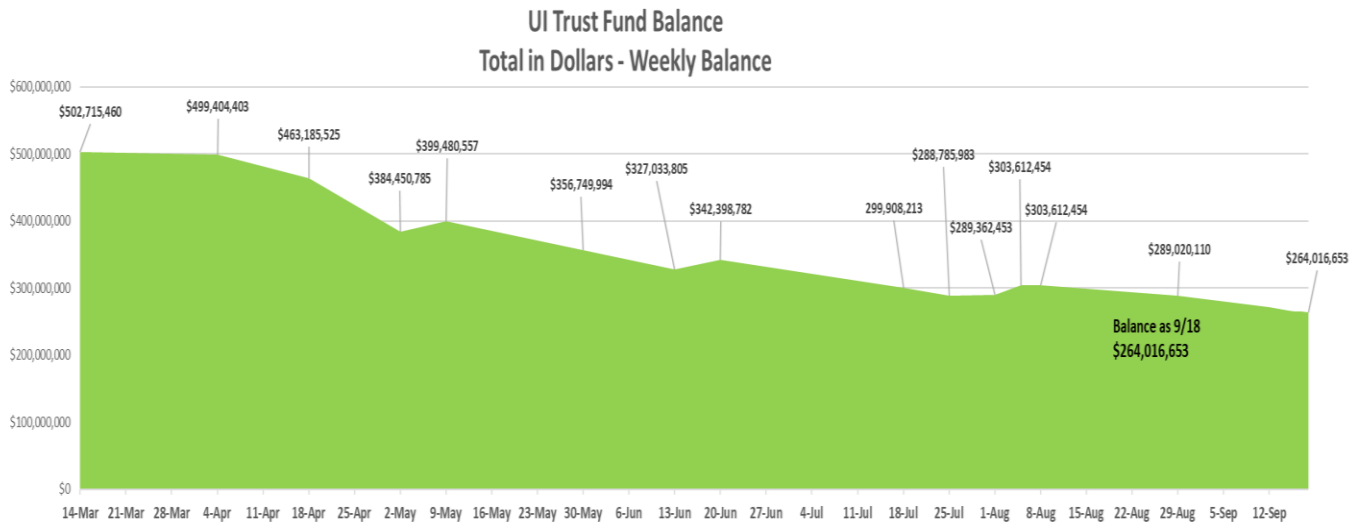


Figure 2.2



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