

To: Vermont Legislature
From: Michael Harrington, Interim Labor Commissioner
Date: May 13, 2020
Subject: Unemployment Insurance Daily Update

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

Current Week Priorities

1. Finalized payment process system update for PUA.
2. Identify and prioritize enhancements for the PUA system.
3. Finalize program requirements for Pandemic Extended Unemployment Compensation Program and the existing federal Extended Benefits Program.

On-going Priorities

- Continue to mass-resolve low-level code issues that created stop-payments (move more Vermonters through the system and get them paid) Code 06, 64, 66, 81 are being cleared daily for claimants that have a weekly benefit amount (WBA) > 0; much fewer issues are needing to be cleared daily
- Continue to improve and clarify PUA application, process, and communication
- Continue public messaging and overall communications
- Legislative Action Team (LAT) working through the constituent management spreadsheet with support from VDOL staff
- VDOL adjudications is providing daily lists of claimants to the Salesforce vendor who need to be flipped from ineligible to eligible in PUA

Previous Accomplishments and Milestones

- Constituent Management tool has completed initial testing phases and will proceed to production. The tool will be ready for implementation this week
- First round of payments were processed for claimants in overpayment. They will begin to receive FPUC benefits going forward, with their weekly benefit amount continuing to offset their overpayment balance.
- Weekly benefits issued to roughly 1,200 PUA claimants who were eligible for PUA between 3/15 and 3/28 who had not yet received a weekly benefit. All claimants in this population received an email from the Department explaining what the payment amount represents. These payments were able to be processed outside of the PUA payment calculation update because they did not include FPUC payments.
- **Population of approximately 9,000 claimants not monetarily eligible for regular UI were pushed to the PUA system on Monday, May 11th. Claimants were notified on Tuesday, May 12th via email to complete their PUA application.**

Ongoing Activities

- Automating transactions for claimants with overpayments receiving FPUC. Currently, this is a manual process.
- Reviewing payment information for PUA over payments and under payments to determine the process for correcting that going forward.
- Creating additional technical assistance and training materials for Maximus Call Center agents.

- Finalizing program requirements for PEUC program. Expected implementation of Monday, May 18th or before.
- Completing requirements sessions on enhancements to the PUA backend to increase the usability for PUA staff.

New Activities

- Improving call escalation process with Maximus Call Center agents.
- DHR and VDOL finalized requirements and information needed to hire more staff to support VDOL UI operations.

Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA)

- VDOL Staff continue to work and clear adjudication issues on initial claims and any associated issues, so far, the staff are able to resolve PUA issues within 36-48 hours.
- PUA support for staff and training on issues, VDOL is in final stages of creating a training and is creating an onboarding plan for PUA (and general UI). These individuals will be PUA Program Super Users and will assist both internal and vendor resources as an escalation resource.
- **PUA Payment Update:** Two weeks ago we became aware that claimants who had filed prior to May 1st had received two payments of the federal \$600 for weeks in which the \$600 was not available. This was for the week of March 15th and the week of March 22nd with the federal \$600 benefit not going into effect until the week of March 29th. This payment calculation error caused this group of claimants to receive an overpayment of \$1,200 in federal benefits and forced us to stop issuing payments in order to reconfigure our payment calculation process within the PUA application. For the past two weeks we have been working with the vendor to correct this complex calculation issue, while also using our staff to test and validate the corrections that are being made, which brings us to where we are today. Today and yesterday, we were able to pay any outstanding PUA claimants for the weeks of March 15th and 22nd because the \$600 is not factored in for those two weeks. These are individuals who opened a PUA claim after May 1st but included a weekly certification for these two weeks in March before the FPUC benefit was put into effect. Additionally, we expect to process payments tomorrow and Friday for any individuals who were not part of the overpayment population. Again, individuals that filed after May 1st. For the overpayment population, we are validating this group and the recalculations, and a following payment will be issued when the validation and payment offset is complete. We anticipate this to occur by the middle of next week, if not sooner.

Communications

- Claimants impacted by PUA payment processing issue were notified of the issue via email. Claimants will be emailed again once final testing is complete and timeline for payments are clear.
- Updating FAQs for PUA and regular UI to answer some of the new claimant questions. This will help reduce the number of calls into the call centers.
- 1200 PUA claimants emailed to explain the payment they received this week.

Call Center Functions Update

- Maximus call center is recording each claimant interaction for quality assurance. Load balancing will occur across Maximus call queues and across the entire system, including supplemental line.

- The recording and monitoring of the Maximus Call Center for call quality has already resulted in corrective action being taken by the vendor.
- Contract amendment is being circulated to address expanded Maximus call center capacity.
- Maximus now has over 200 agents in queue at any one time and is on track to have 300 agents in queue by May 21st.

Unique Populations

- Regular unemployment claimants serving penalty weeks because of a fraudulent determination from a past claim.
- Regular unemployment claimants with overpayment balances whose benefit amount is currently being used to offset their balance. This is currently being corrected by VDOL staff manually because there is no way to mass clear the stop payment.
- Claims under review and pending adjudication

Top Claimant Issues

- Regular unemployment claimants unable to file weekly claims because their claim is still being adjudicated.
- Regular unemployment claimants unable to receive weekly benefits because they have a fraudulent code on their UI claim and are serving penalty weeks.
- Regular UI claimants calling back to check status of their claim to make sure issues have been resolved on their claim the day after speaking to a representative. This is likely because changes are not in real time but are updated overnight when the system processes.
- PUA claimants deemed ineligible because they answered questions incorrectly and would like to update their response. Claimants unable to complete application (PUA or regular UI) because they do not have an email address. VDOL is working with state agency partners to address this issue.

APPENDIX

Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Additional Information

- [Click here for PUA general information](#)
- [Click here for PUA FAQs](#)
- [Click here for PUA application video demonstration](#)

Regular Unemployment Insurance Additional Information

- [Click here for unemployment general information](#)
- [Click here for frequently asked questions](#)

Claims Data as of May 12, 2020

Total Initial Claims	89,485	Total number of initial claims since 3/1/2020.
Initial Claims with no Eligibility Determination	1,283	Initial claims without eligibility determination for UI or PUA. A subset of this population does not, and will not, qualify for UI or PUA.
Unemployment Insurance		
Initial Claimants Eligible for UI	62,997	Number of claimants eligible for UI
Initial Claimants Eligible for UI - Paid	55,982	Number of claimants who are receiving UI benefits
Initial Claimants Eligible for UI - Not Paid	7,015	Number of claimants who meet basic eligibility thresholds but have significant issues that require review and resolution prior to payment. This also includes individuals who have since returned to work and are no longer filing. Roughly 4,500 of these individuals have never filed a weekly claim.
UI Trust Fund Balance (as of 5/11)	\$385,413,655	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		
Initial Claimants Eligible for PUA	25,205	Total number of claimants that could complete the PUA application and are in the system
Initial Claimants Eligible for PUA - Filed	13,770	# of eligible claimants who have completed PUA application
Initial Claimants Eligible for PUA - Filed and Paid	9,689	Number of eligible claimants receiving PUA benefit.
Initial Claimants Eligible for PUA - Filed and Not Paid	4,081*	Number 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	\$34,195,564	Total amount of PUA benefits paid

**Includes pending payments due to PUA system update*