

State Announces Implementation of Unemployment Benefits from Federal CARES Act

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The Baker Administration today announced details for the initial implementation of federal unemployment benefits in the CARES Act, the federal based COVID-19 relief package. The CARES Act, enacted on March 27, will be administered by states.

Today's announcement reflects the first set of partial guidance that Massachusetts will immediately implement to support unemployed workers. The Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) is moving swiftly to implement the new benefit programs and awaits additional guidance from the federal government for the remainder of benefits authorized by the CARES Act.



Understanding the great urgency of commonwealth residents to access these benefits, DUA issued new guidance to instruct all residents of what actions they can take now.

Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC): For individuals currently collecting benefits from regular unemployment compensation:

Overview: An additional \$600 per week for individuals collecting benefits from regular unemployment compensation is being implemented by DUA. The additional \$600 will be added to unemployment benefits retroactive to March 29 and will begin being disbursed to claimants this week.

The FPUC program will provide an additional \$600 per week to individuals who are collecting regular Unemployment Compensation (UC), Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC), Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), Extended Benefits (EB), Trade Readjustment Act (TRA), and Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DA).

The Department has already begun implementing the FPUC program for regular unemployment compensation claimants. The \$600 will be added to all eligible weeks of benefits continuing until July 31, 2020. Those receiving PEUC, PUA, and EB will receive the

additional \$600 payments retroactive to March 29 as soon as their claims are processed and determined eligible.

Next Steps For Claimants: Eligible claimants who are already receiving UI do not need to do anything for the additional \$600 to be added to their weekly benefit amount. This benefit will be available for all new claimants filing for regular Unemployment Compensation as well, which can be done at www.mass.gov/unemployment/covid-19

Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA): For individuals not covered under traditional unemployment insurance (self-employed, gig economy workers, others):

Overview: A benefit will be available for individuals not covered under traditional unemployment insurance – self-employed or gig workers, for example, or those who do not qualify for lack of wages.

PUA will provide up to 39 weeks of unemployment benefits to individuals who are not working as a result of COVID-19 and are self-employed, independent contractors, gig economy workers, and others who otherwise would not qualify for regular UC or EB under state or federal law or PEUC.

These individuals will not be able to claim benefits directly through the UI Online System in Massachusetts, as of this time. The Department of Unemployment Assistance has engaged a vendor to build a new platform to disburse PUA benefits. The platform is expected to begin accepting PUA claims by April 30. Eligible claimants under PUA will be retroactively compensated with this benefit beginning February 2, or the first week a claimant was unable to work as a result of COVID-19, whichever date is later. The last week this benefit is payable is the week ending December 26.

Next Steps For Claimants: Eligible claimants should continue to check for updates at www.mass.gov/unemployment/covid-19 on the new platform, which will be ready this month.

Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC): For Individuals Who Exhausted Previous UI Benefits:

Overview: A 13-week extension of benefits for individuals exhaust their previous benefits. The benefit is not yet available as DUA continues to await federal implementation guidance.

The first week a claimant can be compensated on this benefit is the week beginning March 29, and the last payable week is the week ending December 26.

Next Steps For Claimants: No action at this time. Eligible claimants should continue to check for updates, which will be made available as soon as the state receives information from the federal government.

DUA is committed to moving as quickly as possible to get workers the benefits they deserve during these unprecedented times and will continue to communicate with the public about the status of these benefit programs.