

UPDATE: Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance Announces Guidance On CARES Act Implementation

The Department of Unemployment Assistance is moving swiftly to implement three new public benefit programs that will expand unemployment eligibility; temporarily increase weekly benefits for all claimants; and allow additional categories of people to claim unemployment benefits. The move, the largest expansion of assistance for the Commonwealth's workforce since the Great Depression, follows new guidance from the federal government regarding the CARES Act.

Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA)

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 on or around April 30, 2020. Eligible claimants under PUA will be retroactively compensated with this benefit beginning February 2, 2020, 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, 2020.

Next Steps For Claimants: *Eligible claimants should continue to check for updates at mass.gov/unemployment/covid-19 on the new platform, which will be ready this month. Once the system is up and running, eligible claimants will receive this benefit backdated to February 2, 2020, or the first week a claimant was unable to work as a result of COVID-19.*

Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC)

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 UC claimants. The \$600 will be added to all eligible weeks of benefits retroactive to March 29, 2020 and continuing until July 31, 2020. FPUC monetary disbursements will begin immediately in Massachusetts for those who are currently collecting benefits on regular UC claims. Those receiving PEUC, PUA, and EB will receive the additional \$600 payments retroactive to March 29, 2020 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 mass.gov/unemployment/covid-19.*

Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC)

The PEUC program provides up to 13 weeks of unemployment insurance benefits to individuals who have exhausted their previous unemployment benefits. The first week a claimant can be compensated on this benefit is the week beginning March 29, 2020, and the last payable week is the week ending December 26, 2020. The Department of Unemployment Assistance is awaiting additional federal guidance on how to implement and administer this program and the extended weeks of PEUC benefits are not yet available.

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.*