

N E W S R E L E A S E

Contact: Loree Levy
Aubrey Henry
916-654-9029

Date: March 4, 2021

News Release No.: 21-13

Employment Development Department Provides Unemployment Insurance Program Updates

Sacramento – The Employment Development Department (EDD) today released the latest data on California unemployment claims activity since the pandemic began, and provided updates on actions underway to speed up payment and strengthen customer service, curb fraud, and assist victims of identity theft.

Since March 2020, the Department has processed 20.7 million claims and paid a total of \$126 billion in unemployment benefits—an amount that exceeds five times the number of claims filed during the worst year of the Great Recession. Approximately one-third of these payments are part of the new Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program implemented by Congress last year—a Federal program for people who are not eligible for state unemployment insurance benefits. About two-thirds include state Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits, benefits under Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) extension, or the Federal-State Extended Duration (FED-ED) extension, which provides up to 20 weeks of extra benefits for people who used all their regular UI or PEUC benefits.

This week, the Department completed adding up to 11 weeks of benefits to PUA or PEUC claims—finishing the work by the Department's commitment to complete Phase Two by March 7. Phase One of this rollout was finished in January. Approximately 185,000 claimants included in Phase Two have all now been given the opportunity to certify and receive these benefits if eligible. These extended benefits can help the more than 1.5 million Californians who would have otherwise lost benefits after the federal CARES Act ended on December 27, 2020.

Top-Level Call Center Staff Complete Specialty Training, Strengthening Customer Service

Since the onset of the pandemic, EDD has seen an unprecedented rise in calls to its contact center. This week, the Department graduated 260 top-level call center staff specially trained to research and resolve complex claims, answer questions, and help claimants.

In total, 3,436 EDD agents are helping answer claimant calls and the average wait time to talk with a representative once in the queue is about 40 minutes. In addition, the Department recently expanded translations of its English and Spanish Form 1099-G fact sheets to include Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Korean and Armenian. These guides provide claimants important information about the annual tax season process of receiving Form 1099-Gs from EDD.

(more)

Helping Claimants Avoid Unnecessary Delays in Benefit Payments

EDD has expanded the availability of information to help claimants who must certify their eligibility for benefits every two weeks in order to get payments. Claimants will see expanded information available when they go to complete their next certification. This new language assists the claimant with how to avoid common mistakes in the application process.

The Department will continue to release additional educational materials to help people who are confused by the certification questions in light of the unique challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic. EDD provides "[Step by Step Instructions](#)" and the "[Understanding the Continued Claim Certification Questions](#)" on the website for helpful tips on certifying.

Curbing Fraud Using New Tools and Systems

Last year, California was hit hard by fraud from international and national crime syndicates—particularly those targeting the Federal PUA program, which did not require income or employment verification and allowed claimants to backdate claims to February 2020. In response, California launched a new identity verification system, ID.me, to reduce fraud at the front end of the application process. The Department also thwarted scammers by no longer backdating PUA claims automatically.

The Department has also invested in new fraud prevention technology and investigative tools to assist the process of preventing and catching acts of fraud. EDD provides resources for Californians at the [Help Fight Fraud webpage](#). Between March 2020 and January 2021, the Department's fraud screening measures and new security protections prevented up to \$60 billion in payments to fraudulent claims.

Helping Victims of Identity Theft

The Department set up a designated phone line and online reporting system for anyone who gets a 1099-G form with an inaccurate report of benefits and believes identity theft was involved. Information to help fraud victims is posted [here](#). Anyone who receives a 1099-G from the EDD that is not accurate because of suspected identity theft should report this as fraud by going to [Ask EDD](#), selecting "Form 1099G" and then choosing "Report Fraud." EDD will investigate and issue a corrected 1099-G as appropriate.

The [IRS has made clear](#) that taxpayers who are unable to obtain a timely, corrected 1099-G should still file an accurate tax return, reporting only the income they received.

Resources for identity theft victims are also available by [reporting the crime to the Federal Trade Commission and IRS](#).

###