

Unemployment and Worker Assistance

- 573,000 Massachusetts workers have filed for unemployment in the last four weeks, and the Department of Unemployment Assistance has begun payments to 315,000 workers. As workers and families in Massachusetts continue to feel the economic impacts of the pandemic, these trends will likely continue for the near future, and DUA has taken significant steps to increase staffing levels and capacity to meet this unprecedented rush of demand.
- Beginning last week, federally-funded supplementary unemployment payments of \$600 per week have begun to be distributed by the Department of Unemployment Assistance in addition to regular benefits. Regardless of when payments are distributed, they will be applied retroactively for all weekly claims filed back to March 29.
- Since switching to remote service, over 115,000 calls have been made by over 600 staff at DUA call centers and over 175,000 individuals have participated in DUA's [virtual town halls](#).
- **Economic Impact Payments** (stimulus checks) are beginning to be distributed and some individuals who have direct deposit information on file with the IRS may have already received them. More information on eligibility and distribution timeframes can be found [online](#).
- The Department of Unemployment Assistance has [updated its FAQ](#) regarding Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (aid for those workers who do not qualify for regular UA, including **self-employed and independent contractor workers**). The portal is not yet open for applications but additional clarification on the information required of applicants is now available

Pandemic Unemployment Assistance:

- **What is it?** Unemployment benefits for those who would not normally be eligible – including self-employed individuals, independent contractors, and “gig economy” workers.
- **When is it in effect?** For all unemployment claims beginning February 2, ending prior to December 26.
- **Next steps:** The state is working as quickly as possible to put a system in place to process what is expected to be a large volume of new claims. The system is scheduled to be online by April 30, at which time applications can be submitted online. Once a claim is approved, benefits will be paid retroactively to February 2 to those who qualify.

Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation:

- **What is it?** A 13-week extension to the normal 26 weeks of benefits per calendar year that Massachusetts residents in the unemployment insurance system receive for those who have exhausted their existing benefits.
- **When is it in effect?** For anyone who has exhausted benefits and is still unemployed during weeks between March 29 and December 26.
- **Next steps:** No action at this time. Those who are eligible should continue to check for updates as the state is still awaiting federal guidance.

DUA is experiencing roughly 18x the normal volume of unemployment claims, and they have rapidly increased their customer service staff from 50 employees to over 600 remote employees working 7 days a week. Despite this increase, I know that this process may still cause frustration and anxiety for those waiting on responses to claims or resolutions of issues. As claim volumes continue to rise and new populations become eligible, the department is working to address the many logistical challenges that this crisis has created.

For more information, visit <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/update-massachusetts-department-of-unemployment-assistance-announces-guidance-on-cares>.