

N E W S R E L E A S E

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Employment Development Department Issues Unemployment Insurance Update

SACRAMENTO--The Employment Development Department (EDD) today issued an update on unemployment insurance activities, including increased outreach reminding claimants to reapply at the end of their benefit year and help avoid payment delays.

As the economy continues to recover, the state is also taking action to help ensure the continued strength of the unemployment insurance trust fund. Governor Newsom's California Comeback plan includes \$950 million in Federal Recovery funds to reduce the principal of California's unemployment insurance loan. This will take a burden off employers and result in long-term savings to the state.

Strengthening Outreach to Claimants

In an effort to continue outreach to diverse communities across California, EDD hired a director of stakeholder and community engagement, Brendan Repicky, who will host new community outreach activities to help share useful information about Department programs and seek stakeholder feedback on Department activities. The Department also recently hired a new unemployment insurance branch chief, Grecia Staton, who is committed to strengthening the unemployment insurance branch.

"We are strengthening our partnerships with communities across California," said EDD Director Rita Saenz. "Brendan Repicky and Grecia Staton have the experience to ensure better service for claimants and improved customer service. They are an important addition."

Repicky previously worked for Assemblymember Ken Cooley since 2012, with a special focus on helping constituents and managing legislation. Staton's past EDD experience includes working directly with claimants in the Department call center as well as managing call center staff.

The goal of the new outreach is to keep external partners and stakeholders informed about what the department is doing to reform and help ensure their voices and the voices of those they represent are heard by EDD.

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Improving Call Center Efficiency with Recorded information

EDD continues to take action to improve the customer experience at the call center and reduce call center demand by improving public information about unemployment insurance and processing claims to eliminate the need to call.

The latest data shows that the four-week average of unemployment claims dipped below 3 million claimants for the first time since the start of the pandemic. The number of claimants filing for benefits has fallen every week since early March. Still, the hundreds of thousands of unique callers calling the call center daily continues to overwhelm the call center.

The Department's strategy for managing call center demand includes directing people to online resources and increasing permanent state staff with high-quality training necessary to help customers. The Department is actively recruiting, hiring and training hundreds of new employees to assist claimants and answer their questions. Approximately 4,700 workers are helping process claims and help customers of which about 2,700 agents were taking calls last week. EDD has hired nearly 400 new staff since March.

EDD continues to implement new call center and website features to enhance the customer experience for claimants. These efforts further the Department's goal of continually improving customer service and addressing issues brought forward by claimants.

The Department recently added recorded claimant rights information, which call center staff previously had to read at the end of calls. That extra time can now be used helping other claimants.

The Department has also launched new tools to enhance customer service, including a new online library to help staff research information more quickly and a multi-million dollar investment in language interpreter services. Other actions the Department has taken to improve the customer experience include:

- Launching a new AskEDD platform that is more user-friendly.
- Improving the [online help text](#) to explain the bi-weekly certification and help avoid delays or pending status
- Launching a new [AskEDDy YouTube video series](#) to answer frequent questions
- Continually improving the mobile phone-ready version of the Department website
- Deploying document upload to help claimants save time over mail
- Calling customers directly to seek clarifying information and resolve claims
- Offering to call back callers who reach the queue, rather than waiting on hold
- Monitoring trending issues and areas of confusion and improving public information
- Notifying claimants of a new [tax credit](#) to lower health insurance costs or offer [housing assistance](#)

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- Launching a user-friendly [unemployment data dashboard](#) to boost transparency.

EDD also continues to notify the public proactively about website changes that impact claimants. There is scheduled website maintenance from Friday, May 21, 2021 at 8:00 p.m. through Saturday, May 22, 2021 at 8:00 p.m. for UI Online, SDI Online and Benefit Programs Online platforms. A message on all platforms will notify customers that the systems will not be accessible during the maintenance work.

EDD Text Message and Email Outreach Helps Claimants Avoid Benefit Year End Delays

The Department is continuing its proactive outreach to claimants to remind them to reapply for benefits after 12 months of obtaining benefits. Failure to reapply after the benefit year end is one of the most common reasons someone may have a "pending payment" claim status.

This week, the Department is launching a text and email reminder outreach effort to help claimants avoid delays when their initial claim expires after 12 months. The new emails and text messages from the 510-74 or 918-06 EDD text number remind claimants of the need to reapply after a claim expires.

EDD must collect updated information from a claimant when they reach the [end of their benefit year](#) on their initial claim. That means individuals must reapply, even if they still have a balance remaining on their regular unemployment insurance claim or they are collecting federal extension benefits. The only exception is that Pandemic Unemployment Assistance claimants need not reapply.

Useful information about the type of claim a person is on and what to expect next when the benefit year ends is available at the [Benefit Year End](#) page, which has already been viewed more than 4 million times in just a few weeks.

The Department's English and Spanish [Ask EDDy YouTube videos](#) are also educational resources for claimants seeking information about the benefit year end.

Work Search Certification Does Not Currently Affect Benefit Eligibility

Every two weeks claimants must certify for benefits by answering [bi-weekly certification questions](#), including whether the claimant has looked for work. However, due to the impact of [COVID-19](#) on a worker's ability to find work, claimants have not been required to search for work since March 2020. Thus, claimants may continue to answer "no" to the bi-weekly certification question "Did you look for work?" without impacting eligibility at this time.

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The Department will continue to update the public on any future changes to this work search requirement.

Most claimants, however, will be able to honestly answer “yes” to this question if they have engaged in work search activities such as contacting employers about a job, or searching online or in newspapers or other publications.

For more information on how to answer the bi-weekly certification questions, visit [Understanding the Continued Claim Certifications](#) form. There is also a useful [Ask EDDy YouTube video](#) in English and Spanish about how to answer other bi-weekly certification questions that have confused claimants.

New ID.me Identity Verification Guidance

In an effort to shut the door on unprecedented unemployment benefit fraud last year, EDD was one of the first states in the nation to adopt a new identity verification process, ID.me. Anyone filing a new claim through UI Online must prove identity through ID.me. There is a streamlined process for those who were already verified through ID.me.

EDD has produced another educational [AskEDDy](#) YouTube video to help claimants get through the ID.me validation process more smoothly. The video, offered in English and Spanish, includes helpful tips for how to provide the needed documents to prove identity and how to use the trusted referee video chat process. The video also discusses common reasons why identity documents may be rejected in the process and how to avoid these issues.

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