

N E W S R E L E A S E

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New ID Verification tool helping Californians seeking unemployment benefits

EDD ends two-week reset period with gains on backlog

SACRAMENTO - One day after opening their doors to new claims for unemployment benefits again, the Employment Development Department (EDD) on Tuesday announced the successful installation of a new ID.me identity verification tool that is helping speed the processing of new claims.

“Already, the new tool has helped serve more than 101,000 Californians seeking unemployment benefits for the first time,” said EDD Director Sharon Hilliard. “We continue to refine this new process and smooth the way for applicants, but we are confident this is a giant step forward in helping Californians verify their identity in a simpler, faster way that is helping us block imposter fraud.”

The EDD initiated a soft launch of the new ID.me tool last Thursday, sending emails and texts to a total of 136,000 people who signed up for an EDD notification inviting them back to UI Online to submit their applications for new unemployment claims. Between the soft launch period and Tuesday afternoon, ID.me data shows that 101,159 people used the tool in an effort to verify their identity.

More than 64 percent, or 64,950 people, were able to verify their identity online, including 58,915 who needed no assistance. Another 6,035 people did so with the help of a “trusted referee” in a video chat. By the same time Tuesday, 36,209 people did not verify their identity or talk to a trusted referee for reasons that can include abandoning the screen at a point where further action is required, timing out, or not being able to establish their identity. They can return for up to a week to finish the process.

While at least some of these attempts could be fraudulent, it is also possible that some claimants seeking help from ID.me’s call center did not get assistance given longer-than-average hold times Monday that reached at one point over an hour, or were otherwise unable to complete the process. Until this first rush through the new reopened system settles out, the EDD recommends the best time to verify identity through ID.me for those needing phone assistance is in the morning hours before 10:00 a.m.

“It’s too soon to draw firm conclusions about why those who did not verify their identity were unable to make it through the process, but we will be looking at this data carefully in the weeks ahead to make sure there are no barriers,” Hilliard said. “On balance, we think this tool is already more effective and provides better access to a wide range of Californians than our previous method of verifying identity.”

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Hilliard also said the department has made solid progress following a two-week reset period that ended Sunday. That progress includes:

- Staff were strategically deployed to process both initial claims and pending continued claim payments - resolving about 250,000 claims in the backlog when the EDD initiated the two-week reset period (backlog is defined as the number of claimant's waiting more than 21 days for a resolution.) The new ID.me identity verification tool is expected to help greatly minimize the manual workload that can cause a backlog.
- The most experienced staff focused on clearing the oldest and most complex claims, while newer staff worked through large volumes of mail, email, and outbound calls to claimants.
- Outbound calls helped EDD connect with a few thousand claimants, helping resolve an issue causing delays in payments. Most commonly that included walking them through the required process of answering questions on a bi-weekly certification that confirms their eligibility for benefit payments. Payments cannot be issued without it.

The Department worked in partnership with the California Department of Technology and the Office of Digital Innovation to put ID.me in place, a commercial identity verification tool that was integrated into UI-Online, the system Californians use to apply for unemployment benefits, including federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA).

ID.me helps applicants prove they are who they say they are in a user-friendly automated process that uses multiple data sources to authenticate identity documents or a virtual in-person session requiring specific knowledge of an individual's financial history. The old process of verifying identity was a major driver of claims requiring manual processing, and the EDD Strike Team estimated that 40 percent of claims received were being flagged for manual processing.

EDD has implemented and continues to develop further technology enhancements to increase the number of applications that can be handled without staff intervention, with a goal of processing more than 90 percent of claims automatically.

An assessment of the ongoing processing post-implementation of ID.me will be conducted in the next two weeks by EDD in partnership with the Strike Team and the percentage of claims still requiring manual processing will be reported at that time.

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