

Department of Workforce Development: Clears Wisconsin unemployment claims backlog

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Remaining claims within timely adjudication resolution period, UI claims older than 21 days resolved or assigned

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MADISON — Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek today announced that the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Division has cleared its backlog of regular UI claims. The announcement comes after Gov. Tony Evers officially appointed Pechacek as DWD Secretary today after successfully leading the Department's transition.

"Since the start of the pandemic, our top priority at DWD has been ensuring that all eligible unemployment claims in Wisconsin are paid as quickly as possible," Pechacek said. "Today, I am proud to say we have reached our goal to clear the backlog of claims. The tireless work of DWD staff has made it possible for UI to resume its seasonal level of timeliness in January. I look forward to implementing further enhancements to our UI processes to continue to improve services to Wisconsinites who are out of work through no fault of their own."

DWD has made considerable progress in clearing the UI backlog over the last several months. In addition to UI staff, nearly 1,300 individuals have been hired, reassigned, or contracted with the DWD over the past nine months. Since March 15, 2020, at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, DWD has processed nearly 8.8 million weekly claims compared to the 7.2 million claims handled from 2016 to 2019—more than four years' worth of claims in nine months. As of September 2020,

nearly 100,000 Wisconsinites had pending UI claims.

Under normal, pre-pandemic conditions, issue resolution is considered timely if completed within 21 days of the date the issue was detected. All remaining relevant eligibility issues over 21 days old have now been assigned for adjudication. As of December 26, 2020, approximately 590,095 claimants in Wisconsin have been paid over \$4.68 billion in UI benefits since the beginning of the pandemic.

Adjudication is the investigation and resolution of eligibility issues raised on unemployment insurance claims. Eligibility issues arise from several places including the initial or weekly claim, employer contact, claimant contact, and tips from the public. Adjudication is a manual process that requires interested parties be provided due notice to respond to the eligibility issue. Issues are not relevant for adjudication if, for example, they are being held for identity verification.

As previously reported, DWD partnered with Google Cloud to perform predictive analytics, comprehensive data models, and confidence scores associated with various hold and issues on pending claims. DWD staff used the output from these analytics to run their own validation processes and tests, and then made recommendations on how to move forward with shortened adjudication timelines on a portion of claims in the backlog. DWD did not deny any claimant benefits based on the claim analytics. The UI program continues to utilize safeguards to detect and prevent erroneous payments as much as possible prior to any payments being made.

For more information on Wisconsin's UI program and future claim data, please visit <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/ui/>.