

# DWD: Implements Expanded Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program (PUA)

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MADISON – The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) has launched an expansion of the federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program (PUA). In February, the U.S. Dept. of Labor expanded eligibility for the program to include three new COVID-related reasons under which a person may qualify. This week, DWD is mailing notices to nearly 28,000 people who were initially denied PUA benefits telling them they can re-apply. Depending on when someone was first affected by the pandemic, they could potentially receive up to 79 weeks of back payments.

“This expansion by the Biden administration recognizes that people should not have to choose between paying their bills and keeping their families safe. We know thousands of Wisconsinites, many of whom have pre-existing conditions, did not feel safe returning to work as the pandemic swept across our state if their employers chose not to enforce safety precautions,” DWD Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek said. “Additionally, some businesses, in an effort to protect the public or simply in response to demand, were able to stay open but with a substantially scaled-back or modified workforce. Now all of these impacted workers will be eligible for critical federal benefits under the PUA program.”

The new PUA expansion includes:

- Someone who was denied continued unemployment benefits because they did not return to work or accept an offer of work at a worksite that was out of compliance with local, state, or national health and safety standards directly related to COVID-19. Such standards include those related to face mask wearing, physical distancing measures, or access to personal protective equipment consistent with public health guidelines.
- Someone who provides services to an educational institution or educational service agency and is unemployed or partially unemployed because of volatility in their work schedule that is directly caused by the COVID-19 public health emergency. This includes changes in schedules and partial closures.
- Someone whose hours have been reduced or who was laid off as a direct result of the COVID-19 public health emergency. Such an example may be a server at a restaurant who was laid off for eight weeks while the restaurant was closed for in-person dining but remained open for carry-out and delivery service.

People who previously applied for PUA by December 27, 2020 can backdate their applications to whenever they were first impacted by the pandemic. Once someone receives their application in the mail, they should complete it and upload it online in their claimant portal.

Someone who had not previously filed for PUA but believes they are now eligible can also apply for the expansion. They will be able to file a PUA application under one of the three new reasons but will be subject to backdating limitations. DWD officials expect to release millions of dollars of additional PUA payments under the new expansion.

For more information on expanded PUA and other UI programming, visit <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/ui/>