

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE TO REACH WORKERS TYPICALLY LEFT OUT

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Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA)

Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) provides emergency unemployment assistance to workers who are left out of regular state UI or who have exhausted their state UI benefits (including any Extended Benefits that might become available in the future). Up to 39 weeks of PUA are available to workers who are immediately eligible to receive PUA. The program will expire on December 31, 2020, unless otherwise extended.

Importantly, this program will provide income support to many workers who are shut out of the state UI systems in this country. In fact, workers who are eligible for state UI are not eligible for the PUA program.

Those eligible for PUA include self-employed workers, including independent contractors, freelancers, workers seeking part-time work, and workers who do not have a long-enough work history to qualify for state UI benefits.

(Note that in most states, however, “gig” workers should qualify for regular UI because of the broad definitions of employment in so many state UI laws and should be encouraged and supported in applying for regular UI. States should be encouraged to streamline their applications and to request pay data in bulk from major companies. In states that have passed formal exemptions from UI for transportation network company drivers or app-based workers, PUA will provide crucial benefits.)

Applicants will need to provide self-certification that they are (1) partially or fully unemployed, OR (2) unable and unavailable to work because of one of the following circumstances:

- They have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or have symptoms of it and are seeking diagnosis;
- A member of their household has been diagnosed with COVID-19;
- They are providing care for someone diagnosed with COVID-19;

- They are providing care for a child or other household member who can't attend school or work because it is closed due to COVID-19;
- They are quarantined or have been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine;
- They were scheduled to start employment and do not have a job or cannot reach their place of employment as a result of a COVID-19 outbreak;
- They have become the breadwinner for a household because the head of household has died as a direct result of COVID-19;
- They had to quit their job as a direct result of COVID-19;
- Their place of employment is closed as a direct result of COVID-19; or
- They meet other criteria established by the Secretary of Labor.

Workers are not eligible for PUA if they can either telework with pay or are receiving paid sick days or paid leave. Unfortunately, workers must be authorized to work to be eligible for PUA, meaning that undocumented workers will not qualify.

The PUA program will run from January 27, 2020 through December 31, 2020. Workers will be eligible for retroactive benefits and can access benefits for a maximum of 39 weeks, including any weeks for which the person received regular UI. But eligibility will sunset on December 31, 2020 absent any extensions.

PUA benefits are calculated the same way as they are for the federal Disaster Unemployment Assistance program under the Stafford Act, which is the model for the PUA program. PUA will have a minimum benefit that is equal to one-half the state's average weekly UI benefit (about \$190 per week).