

Spring 2021 Update: Unemployment Insurance during COVID-19

In March 2021, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan. This new law expands and increases unemployment insurance (UI) to help workers stay afloat while the COVID-19 pandemic continues.

Below are **7 pieces of essential information** to know about accessing UI in Rhode Island since the enactment of the American Rescue Plan.

1) Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) has been extended through September 2021.

PUA is available until September 6, 2021 for those out of work due to COVID-19 and who do not regularly qualify for UI. This includes:

- Self-employed individuals, freelancers, gig workers, and independent contractors
- Part-time workers
- Those with a work history that is too short to qualify for state unemployment insurance
- Those who otherwise do not qualify for state UI benefits

In addition, **PUA claimants are now eligible for up to 79 weeks of benefits**. The additional weeks will be added to your claim automatically- there is no need to reapply. For individuals who previously exhausted their weeks of PUA, they will now be able to collect benefits again beginning 3/21/21.

2) Additional weeks have been added for those collecting state Unemployment Insurance (UI) through September 2021.

Those who qualify for state UI can now receive up to **53 weeks of additional benefits** through September 6, 2021 if they exhaust their regular benefits before then.

3) \$300 per week boost for everyone receiving state UI/PUA.

Everyone collecting UI/PUA benefits will automatically receive an extra \$300 per week through September 6, 2021 on top of their regular benefit rate. No action is required by claimants to receive this boost.

This boost, and all UI/PUA payments, are taxable. So please note the amount deposited will be less than \$300 if you opt to have taxes withheld.

4) Medicaid, Rite Care, and Child Care Assistance will not be lost when collecting UI/PUA benefits.

UI/PUA benefits, including the \$300 boost, will not count towards eligibility for Medicaid, Rite Care, and Child Care Assistance.

5) The first \$10,200 of UI/PUA benefits will be exempt from taxes

The first \$10,200 of income from UI/PUA benefits is now tax-free for individual taxpayers with an income below \$150,000 per year for the 2020 tax year.

6) Apply for UI/PUA through the Department of Labor and Training (DLT)

To apply, see: dlt.ri.gov/covid19/

7) Check DLT's website and twitter for updates and more information

Updates and additional information will be posted at dlt.ri.gov/covid19/updates/ and on twitter.com/RI_DLT.

For issues regarding your individual claim, contact the UI Call Center at (401) 415-6772.

Please note that though these programs do not expire until 9/6/21, you may exhaust your individual benefits before this date, depending on how many weeks you have already used.

After 9/6/21, only those who qualify for state UI (for non-COVID related reasons) will be able to access benefits unless Congress acts to again extend these programs. Stayed tuned for updates by checking dlt.ri.gov/ and going to the [Economic Progress Institute's COVID-19 page](#).