United Way Town Hall Q&A

**Q.** What accommodations do you have for the disabled? What about those who have Mental Health issues and cannot sit on a phone or do not have internet access? What is the best way to get people through the bottleneck?

**A.** Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities at ADA@dew.sc.gov. For individuals who do not have reliable internet access, claims can be taken over the phone. We realize there may be difficulty reaching us during this pandemic, but are working as hard as we can to expand our capabilities.

**Q.** Do call center reps have access to telephone interpreter services?

**A.** Yes, we have a dedicated line for Spanish speaking individuals and access to interpreter services for individuals who speak other languages.

**Q.** For those who have been denied and after escalating them, they were approved. Is there a way to not have to use the appeal process but instead get the glitch fixed for that person?

**A.** We encourage individuals who disagree with DEW's decision to file an appeal because, by law, their right to appeal is waived after 10 days in most cases. However, some issues that are preventing payment may be resolved favorably while the appeal is pending - either by contact from the claimant to DEW or when the case is reviewed prior to the appeal hearing. In other cases, a denial of benefits will stand until the decision is reversed on appeal. At this time, we do not have a separate process in place for resolving claim issues.

**Q.** Consumers are being told by new call center workers that because they are working from home, there is no supervisor available to help with more complicated issues. They are suggesting that consumers just call back and try to get another rep who has more authority or just wait until the offices open. How do we advise these consumers?

**A.** Calls that require escalation should be transferred to the next tier, individuals should not be told to call back.

**Q.** I had a client who was on the phone waiting for 3.5 hours and the first person they spoke with did not have access to a computer.

**A.** We are aware of this particular customer's experience and have addressed it internally. This should not be a common experience because we require all staff to have computer access. Please continue reporting incidents such as this, to us, so that we can address them.

**Q.** I have someone that has been trying to reach a representative to correct hours worked for a week from 3 weeks ago where he claims too many hours. However, everyone he has spoken with is new and
can't do much. He held for 3-4 hours for a few days in a row and was told he will get a call back but no one has called yet. Will he still be able to make that correction even though it has been 4 weeks ago that the error was made? Is there any other way besides calling in that he can make that correction?

A. The correction can be at any time when we receive the corrected hours.

Q. Why can’t there be a system where you dial in and you get a call back when someone is ready to speak so people won’t have to wait for 2 hours?

A. We have hired more staff to answer calls and resolve issues instead of utilizing the call back function.

Q. What would it take for your call system to be able to schedule call backs?

A. The call back was not as efficient as adding more staff to answer calls.

Q. What happens to the person, like a restaurant worker, who has worked but their employer did not file? How do they get their claim in?

A. They should file an individual claim through the “my benefits” portal.

Q. If you’re asking us to assist with UI filing, can you commit to communicating with us so that we can be of more help? We need answers to questions from self-employed people in terms of how best to complete claims, how to complete forms that are being sent to them that are not relevant.

A. Yes we will plan a webinar for the group.

Q. can we help with getting that training to nonprofits? We can ask the Librarians to train others if that helps?

A. Yes we will plan a webinar for the group.

Q. When are SC Works centers going to re-open?

A. Centers will start opening over the next few weeks.

Q. What about screen sharing to help folks file virtually?

A. This could cause a problem with PII information.
Q. Isn’t there a YouTube video already available? I thought I saw it on SC DEW YouTube page.
A. Yes there are YouTube videos covering multiple topics.

Q. What is the definition of claims per week? Is that the total number unemployed and getting assistance?
A. That is the number of new claims filed per week.

Q. If claims per week are just new claims, when the number goes down, it does not mean the total number unemployed is going down. It just means the number unemployed is not increasing as fast.
A. Correct, it just means the number of people filing a new claim is going down. It does not take into account those continuing to file weekly.

Q. Can you sort claims by industry and pull out nonprofits as a category?
A. Yes we can pull out the nonprofits.

Q. Any indication on the possible range of percent unemployed over the rest of the year?
A. There really is no consensus yet among forecasters on how the unemployment rate will change for the rest of the year. We are certainly dealing with a phenomenon most states have never encountered before in modern times. With the national unemployment rate reaching nearly 15% in April, it will really depend on how quickly things return to normal including how many people go back to work, whether they feel confident in their continued employment, and whether additional waves of virus outbreak occur. We are not likely to see unemployment rates near their pre-pandemic levels in the next several years.

Q. What do you anticipate as the largest sector loss in employment moving forward?
A. Between 3/15 and 5/9 the sectors with the largest number of UI claims have been (1) Accommodation and Food Service, (2) Manufacturing, (3) Health Care, (4) Retail Trade, and (5) Administrative Support and Waste Management (includes temporary staffing agencies). Other sectors that are smaller but have also been hard hit given their relative size include the “other services” sector (nail salons, barber shops, etc.).

Q. Is DEW projecting a reoccurrence of business closures if the virus continues to spread as we are trying to reopen and get back to some type of new normalcy?
A. It is unknown at this time how the virus will react as the state’s economy is slowly reopened nor what the business or government response will be if an uptick in cases does occur. DEW is monitoring the daily case totals announced by DHEC as well as the number of new and continued claims for benefits being filed on a daily basis to identify any trends.

Q. Does it help expedite anything for employers to file claims on behalf of their employees?
A. Employers filing on behalf of the employees can help move the process along quicker.

Q. Any word when the PEUC will begin? I heard mid-May.
A. PEUC will be available in approximately 2 weeks (end of May).

Q. Do you see a risk that the 2.5 month PPP loans ends and folks start laying off, and around the same time the PUC $600 ends?
A. We could not assess what the risk would be in this case.

Q. Is DEW pushing for broadband expansion?
A. As a part of Accelerate SC we agree with and support broadband expansion.

Q. Aren’t workers who are unemployed due to COVID 19 only exempt from seeking new employment?
A. During the state of emergency, the regulatory requirement that claimants conduct 2 online job searches in SCWOS has been waived. We hope this makes the weekly certification easier for claimants during this time. All other eligibility requirements remain in place.

Q. Is there any chance DEW can reconsider cutting the number of state weeks to 20 weeks back to 26, recognizing that this is going to be a long recovery? Also, will DEW be providing guidance about what is considered “good cause” to not return to work? What type of documentation one will have to provide and how should they get that to the agency?
A. Extending the number of weeks would require a legislative change. The CARES Act has laid out “good cause” related to PUA claims, however under state UI the same able and available rules would apply.

Q. I understand it would require a legislative change but as an agency will DEW work to help make this happen, you were very active to get the weeks cut 10 years ago.
A. DEW does not lobby for legislative changes.
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Q. Is there a minimum age to be eligible for unemployment?
A. There is no minimum age, but you have to meet able and available.

Q. Define soft skills. These may be areas that NPOs can assist in preparations with volunteer-based training.
A. Examples of soft skills are showing up on time, getting along with others, and conflict resolution.

Q. Many self-employed people have filed and been denied, do they still go in every week and re-apply?
A. The self-employed that were denied should apply for PUA.

Q. Since the system is not set up for the self-employed, can a step-by-step instruction sheet be published on the website like the one for those that were traditionally employed?
A. The directions to apply for PUA are currently on our website.

Q. Why does the "Corporate Officer" interview come up twice for self-employed people?
A. For those who have applied for PUA, the corporate officer question will not have any effect on the PUA claim.

Q. Can you tell us more about those using the reimbursable structure? How many organizations? Are you seeing many claims from these types of organizations? Would love to see how we can help them.
A. We are seeing an increased number of claims from reimbursable employers. For instance schools, hospitals and nonprofits.
Q. Do we know what the average wait time from application to delivery of UI benefits?
A. It can take up to 21 days.

Q. What is the time frame under the law, without the one week wait under families first?
A. There is no time frame under the law.

Q. We know that legally the agency has up to 21 days, but what is the wait time now? We have people who have been waiting 7+ weeks.
A. DEW would need to look at the specific information in the claim to see what is delaying payment. That usually means there is an issue on the claim, but there are delays that have been the result of our unprecedented claim volume.

Q. Is DEW hiring?
A. Yes DEW is currently hiring.