

# **COVID-19, Unemployment Insurance, and People with Disabilities**

This fact sheet details common questions that we have received about Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid and Unemployment Insurance. Because Unemployment Insurance is a state-federal partnership, state unemployment programs vary substantially, and this fact sheet does not attempt to provide details on different state systems.

## **What is Unemployment Insurance?**

Unemployment Insurance (UI) is a joint federal-state program that temporarily pays people who have lost their job through no fault of their own (i.e., not for grounds that constitute misconduct and not voluntarily quitting) while they look for a new job. Many UI programs require that people are looking for full-time work to be eligible for UI.

## **What are the new UI policies that Congress passed?**

The CARES Act (the third Coronavirus response bill) included three major UI policy changes.

### **Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA)**

The new PUA program provides emergency unemployment assistance to workers who usually are not covered by state UI, including part time workers. Applicants will need to provide self-certification that they are (1) partially or fully unemployed, OR (2) unable and unavailable to work because of a particular circumstance, including:

- They have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or have symptoms of it and are seeking diagnosis
- 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 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

**Most importantly, this includes many part time workers, so people with disabilities on SSI or Social Security benefits may be eligible if they have lost their jobs due to COVID-19.**

### **Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (PUC)**

PUC increases both the state UI benefit amount and the PUA benefit amount by an additional \$600 per week.

### **Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC)**

PEUC allows workers with an additional 13 weeks of state UI benefits.

<sup>1</sup> Program Operations Manual System (POMS), SI 00830.230 *Unemployment Insurance Benefits*, <https://secure.ssa.gov/poms.nsf/lnx/0500830230>.

<sup>2</sup> Social Security Act, SEC. 1611(e)(2).

<sup>3</sup> Social Security Act, SEC. 1612(a)(2)(B).

## **How does receiving state UI or the new PUA benefits impact people on Social Security Disability Insurance, Disabled Adult Child benefits, or other forms of Social Security benefits?**

Unemployment income counts as unearned income, so the Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) income limit does not apply. This means that people receiving Social Security Disability Insurance or Disabled Adult Child benefits or other forms of Social Security benefits can claim unemployment without worrying about the usual income limit.

## **Does receiving state UI or the new PUA benefits impact people on Supplemental Security Income (SSI)?**

Unemployment income also counts as unearned income for SSI. This means that SSI benefits may be offset by the amount of the unemployment benefits. This is particularly likely because of the increased PUC benefits authorized by the CARES Act.

People on SSI may also encounter issues with the \$2,000 asset limit for individuals and \$3,000 asset limit for married couples, especially given the generous PUC benefits and the likelihood that people may receive multiple weeks of retroactive benefits at one time due to lags in state implementation of the new programs. If SSI recipients receive benefits that would push them over the asset limits, they should consider spending those funds right away to purchase needed supplies.

In addition, people on SSI are **required** to apply for other benefits they may be eligible for,<sup>2</sup> including unemployment insurance.<sup>3</sup> **If people with disabilities have been working and lost jobs because of COVID, they likely are required to apply for the new PUA program.**

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