Employment Security Department
WASHINGTON STATE

Unemployment Insurance Customer Service

The pandemic exposed serious gaps in service and access to unemployment insurance. The Employment Security Department is committed to improving both program access and the experience for our customers. Lots of progress has been made and much work remains.

Improving call wait times and phone experience

The Unemployment Insurance (UI) customer phone system project will replace the current UI telephony system with a modern, cloud-based, contact-center solution. It will improve customer experience and provide operating efficiencies by:

- Simplifying phone menus and getting callers to agents quickly.
- Providing a consistent customer experience by matching phone and online services.
- Offering customers in-queue callback options to eliminate on-hold waits.
- Streamlining contact center processes and offer better and more efficient service.
- Offering greater flexibility to respond to the changing needs of our customers.
- Providing real-time analytics to improve our response to call volume changes.
- Integrating more fully with UTAB, our UI benefits IT system.

Better customer letters

ESSB 5193 directed ESD to revise determination letters explaining eligibility for UI benefits. Letters must be clearer, easier to understand and contain key facts about the case. New templates for the letters and first-round edits of over 700 specific paragraphs are complete. Project work will be completed in the following phases over the next six months:

- User-test the revised paragraphs with customers.
- Complete second round edits as necessary based on user feedback.
- Translate the final content into multiple languages per budget proviso requirement.
- Complete final programming and testing.
- Make all revised content available in UI benefits IT system by early June 2023.

Pandemic-era overpayment relief

Pandemic conditions and changing federal requirements contributed to many claimants receiving large benefit overpayments during the pandemic era – Feb. 2, 2020, to Sept. 4, 2021. The current

overpayment waiver processes are not providing enough relief. ESD's top-priority project provides help for these claimants, and the key components will launch in Q1 2023:

- Automated processing of USDOL approved bulk waivers – no claimant action needed.
- Charge-off of overpayments less than $1,000 – no claimant action needed.
- A web-based form to accept individual waiver requests.
    - ESD will use expanded not-at-fault waiver criteria to determine waiver eligibility.
    - Staff will assist claimants who have challenges using the web-based form.

More equitable access for all

ESD is using $6.8 million in federal grant funds to promote meaningful and equitable access to UI programs. ESD will:

- Translate determination letters into the state's top-ten languages.
- Reduce complexity and improve navigation on ESD's public facing website using industry standard useability principles.
- Use real-time data to quickly find and remove barriers to equitable access to services.
- Participate in a national data partnership to identify inequities and guide the implementation of new strategies to advance equity.
- Complete a rigorous UI program access study. We will pilot a project to promote more equitable access with full net-impact evaluation.

ESD is investing to provide better support in person, over the phone and via live chat to increase language access and remove technology barriers for customers who struggle with accessing UI services online.

- Dedicated phone line for claimants with high technology barriers.
- Trained staff in WorkSource Centers to answer questions, file basic claims and schedule appointments to resolve complex issues.
- Pilot project to place UI specialists in-person at WorkSource offices to serve claimants by appointment.

- Dedicated Limited English Proficiency (LEP) phone line and easy interpreter access.
- UI landing pages in seventeen languages on ESD's website.
- Eligibility determination letters translated to the top-ten languages.

Learn more

Visit our website: esd.wa.gov page.
Contact: Caitlyn Jekel, Government Relations Director| caitlyn.jekel@esd.wa.gov| 360-790-9951