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## FISCAL UPDATE Article

Fiscal Services Division

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### COVID-19 — PANDEMIC UNEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE (PUA) PROGRAM — JANUARY 2021

The [Pandemic Unemployment Assistance \(PUA\) Program](#) was extended from 39 weeks to 50 weeks on December 27, 2020, as President Trump signed the \$2.3 billion [Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021](#), which includes the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021. Benefits were increased by an additional \$100 per week in the legislation. Funding for the PUA benefits will be provided from federal funds.

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) announced on April 5, 2020, the publication of Unemployment Insurance Program Letter [No. 16-20](#), providing guidance to states for implementation of the PUA Program. The DOL provided additional guidance with the April 27, 2020, publication of Unemployment Insurance Program Letter [No. 16-20, Change 1](#), the July 21, 2020, publication of Unemployment Insurance Program Letter [No. 16-20, Change 2](#), and the August 27, 2020, publication of Unemployment Insurance Program Letter [No. 16-20, Change 3](#). Under the PUA Program, individuals who do not qualify for regular unemployment compensation and are unable to continue working as a result of COVID-19, such as self-employed workers, independent contractors, and gig economy workers, are eligible for PUA benefits. This provision is contained in Section 2102 of the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act ([H.R. 748](#)), enacted on March 27, 2020.

According to the Iowa Department of Workforce Development (IWD), the PUA Program provides unemployment benefits to individuals who are self-employed, independent contractors, nonprofit employees, or gig economy workers, as well as to individuals who are working part-time or who otherwise would not qualify for regular unemployment compensation or extended benefits under State or federal law or the [Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation \(PEUC\) Program](#). A claimant can be compensated with this benefit beginning February 2, 2020, or the first week a claimant was unable to work as a result of COVID-19, whichever date is later. Benefits end as of March 14, 2021. This benefit also applies to anyone who has exhausted all unemployment insurance payment options at the State or federal level, including the PEUC Program. Additional information provided by the IWD can be found [here](#).

The IWD [reports](#) that a total of approximately \$4.3 million in PUA benefits have been paid for the week ending December 19, 2020. The IWD has reported weekly PUA benefit payments beginning with the week ending April 18, 2020, totaling approximately \$166.7 million.

The PUA benefits described above and unemployment benefits of any kind are not available to employees who quit their job, refuse to return to work, or refuse to receive full-time pay. Attempts to collect payments after quitting a job could be viewed as fraudulent and will be further investigated by the IWD. The CARES Act specifically provides for serious consequences for fraudulent cases, including fines, confinement, and an inability to receive future unemployment benefits until all fraudulent claims and fines have been repaid.

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