



## COVID-19 Update: State and Federal Unemployment Insurance Changes in Georgia

Unemployment insurance (UI) provides compensation to workers recently laid off due to no fault of their own. Georgia is expected to see unprecedented demand for UI during the coronavirus pandemic. Estimates show the economy will shed up to 608,000 jobs before the summer months, with the brunt of job losses felt by workers employed in low-wage occupations.<sup>1</sup>

Following federal and state declarations of a public health emergency, thousands faced job losses. In just two weeks, UI claims in Georgia jumped from 5,445 to 133,820, an unprecedented increase of 2,300 percent.<sup>2</sup> As more Georgians and businesses adhere to social distancing requirements, UI claims will continue to grow at a rapid pace.

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**133,820 claims**  
Week ending on  
March 28, 2020

**5,445 claims**  
Week ending on  
March 14, 2020

### Changes to Unemployment Insurance in Georgia

Immediately, Georgia began enacting emergency rules that ease access to the state's regular unemployment insurance program. To date, the Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL) has:

- ✔ Mandated employers file UI claims on behalf of workers that they anticipate temporarily laying off, which helps workers access assistance more quickly and does not require claims to be filed in-person;
- ✔ Suspended job search requirements for claims filed on or after March 14, 2020;
- ✔ Extended eligibility to workers with reduced hours or those leaving work temporarily due to illness, to care for a family member who is ill or due to lack of child care as a result of their provider or school being closed during the pandemic; and
- ✔ Extended the duration of state UI payments from 14 weeks to 26 weeks.

On March 27, 2020 Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which established three historic unemployment compensation programs. Each of the programs are fully federally funded and are designed to substantially enhance Georgia’s regular state UI system in the following ways:

Program Established by CARES Act	Elements
Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program (PUA)	Provides help for workers who do not qualify for the usual state unemployment insurance, including the <b>self-employed, independent contractors and gig workers</b> , for up to 39 weeks, through December 31, 2020.
Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (PUC)	Through July 31, 2020, all regular state UI and PUA claimants will receive their usual UI payments <b>plus an additional \$600 per week</b> .
Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC)	Extends the duration of regular state UI by an additional <b>13 weeks</b> .

**These provisions in the CARES Act will boost unemployment compensation by \$2.7 billion for laid-off Georgians, with an additional 255,000 workers projected to benefit from the federal programs.<sup>3</sup>**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Cooper, D. & Wolfe, J. (2020, April 1). Nearly 20 million workers will likely be laid off or furloughed by July. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/blog/nearly-20-million-jobs-lost-by-july-due-to-the-coronavirus/>

<sup>2</sup>Georgia Department of Labor (2020). Processed unemployment claims at highest ever. <http://meltwater.pressify.io/publication/5e860ebc080e4b0004c0c83f/5b296714f502c80e0024fd3a?&sh=false>

<sup>3</sup>Stettner, A. (2020, March 25). Key provision in COVID-19 stimulus would boost unemployment benefits by \$115 billion for 11+ million workers. The Century Foundation. <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/covid-stimulus-3-0-ui-reaction/>

