



The State of Unemployment in Hawaii

What the state's recent shutdown means for your employees

Get Answers to Employer FAQs



Once again Hawaii finds itself in the middle of another shutdown. Many businesses are being forced to shut down temporarily or permanently—and employees have questions. Here's what employers need to know right now.

Q: What is unemployment insurance?

Unemployment Insurance is a joint program of the federal and state governments. In Hawaii, it provides temporary cash benefits to workers who become fully unemployed or separated from their employer (e.g. layoffs) or partially/temporarily unemployed but attached to their employer (e.g. reduced hours, zero-hours furlough, etc.), through no fault of their own, and who meet the eligibility requirements as determined by the state.

Q: How long will employees receive State Benefits?

Employees can receive State benefits for a limit of 26 weeks that can be *accumulated* throughout their benefit year as the economy opens and closes. Previous weeks of unemployment benefits count against 26 weeks and the 26 week period does not restart every time they are laid off or furloughed.

Q: What happens when employees run out of state unemployment benefits?

Through the CARES Act, state unemployment benefits can be extended for an *additional 13* weeks through the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) program. This means that an employee can receive unemployment benefits for up to 39 total weeks. In order to qualify, employees must exhaust their state unemployment benefits and apply separately to receive PEUC benefits. The State has provided [these instructions](#) on how to apply for PEUC benefits.

Q: Do employees need to reapply for state unemployment benefits if they were previously fully or partially unemployed?

Employees do not need to create a new unemployment account or submit a new application if they're still within their benefit year and have not exhausted their State unemployment benefits. However, employees may need to reactivate their unemployment account and from there, continue filing weekly claim benefits.

Q: How much unemployment benefits can employees get?

	Full Unemployment <i>e.g. laid off etc.</i>	Partial Unemployment <i>e.g. reduced hours, furlough, etc.</i>
State UI Benefit: <i>26 cumulative weeks</i>	Up to \$648 per week*	Ranges of \$5 - \$648 per week*
FEMA Benefit: <i>5 weeks retroactive to August 1, 2020</i>	Extra \$300**	Extra \$300**
PEUC Benefit: <i>13 weeks once State UI Benefits have been exhausted. This benefit expires December 31, 2020</i>	\$TBD (the amount employees qualified for under State Unemployment)	\$TBD (the amount employees qualified for under State Unemployment)

* Specific benefit amounts depend on an employee's previous employment, salary history for the past 18 months, any current income they're still earning, and any other benefits they still receive. Share the [Hawaii Unemployment Insurance Benefit Estimator](#) to approximate the benefit amount they could receive from the state, noting that this estimate may differ their actual benefit amount.

** As long as the employee receives at least \$100/week in unemployment benefits from a state or federal unemployment benefits program.

The current weekly amount for state unemployment ranges from **\$5 – \$648 per week** depending on eligibility criteria. Meanwhile, a new Executive Order was signed on August 8 to authorize the "[Assistance Program for Lost Wages](#)" which will provide an additional **\$300 per week** on top of a worker's regular unemployment benefits. We refer to it as the "**FEMA Benefit**" because it is a program administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Q: Tell me more about the \$300 per week FEMA Benefits?

This program will retroactively provide additional unemployment benefits of \$300 per week for five weeks to all eligible individuals that receive at least \$100 per week in unemployment insurance benefits. The Hawaii Department of Labor will begin processing payments in October and payments will be staggered for each week individuals are eligible (i.e. weeks ending 8/1/2020, 8/8/2020, 8/15/2020, 8/22/2020 and 8/29/20).

To receive this benefit, individuals must sign into their State Unemployment accounts on the unemployment insurance portal and answer a pop-up page that allows them to self-certify that they were partially or wholly unemployed due to COVID-19. A graphic demonstrating the process is available [here](#). **Employees must self-certify by September 20, 2020 to receive this benefit.**

Note: Individuals with pending issues preventing payment will not receive the additional \$300 per week if they are allowed benefits after the program has ended. Unlike the FPUC program (\$600 plus-up) that ended in July, this program is a grant with a finite amount of funding. When FEMA exhausts its grant funding, it will no longer have the resources to provide payments and the program will end.

Q: Why is the FEMA Benefit only \$300 and not \$400 per week?

Each state has the option to provide workers \$100 extra from state funds so that in combination with the \$300 FEMA Benefit, workers can get \$400 extra per week. However, not all states have exercised, or are financially able to exercise, this option. Governor Ige is currently considering adding the extra \$100 per week in state unemployment payments, however, no decision on this has been made.

Q: Why aren't employees receiving the \$600 per week benefit anymore?

Employees may have received an additional **\$600 per week** in federal benefits starting the week of March 28 through July 25, 2020, as part of an *expired* benefit under the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) program, also known as the “**Federal \$600 Plus Up.**”



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