



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT OF UNEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE

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DUA ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday, May 15, 2025
Meeting Minutes

Council Attendees: Richard Marlin, John Drinkwater, Chris Carlozzi, Renee Harper
EOLWD/DWD/DUA/Public Attendees: Katie Dishnica, David Gold, Corey Mescon, Stephanie Herron Rice, Ashley Thompson, Lisa Hemmerle, Josh Cutler, John Saulnier, Jeannie Pena, Jason Salgado, Mark Costello, Laura Santiago, Paolo Franzese, Rena Kottcamp, Wendy Filosi, Rory McAnaney, Harrison Flynn

A virtual meeting was held via Zoom.

A motion was proposed to approve the April 2025 meeting minutes.

- Motion was seconded.
- Vote on Motion – all in favor to approve.

Executive Update

Katie Dishnica, Director of DUA, provided an executive update.

The next Advisory Council meeting will be dedicated to fraud and improper payments. If there are any specific categories you want to discuss please let me know.

The new EMT system went live. It is going well overall.

- 50,699 claimants were able to certify for their weekly benefits.
- 10,900 initial claims were filed.
- 121,681 weekly certifications since go live.
- 9,800 responses to fact findings from claimants.
- 7,228 transactions processed.

Claimants are able to access the system and use it.

Question by Rich Marlin: If someone makes an error with their banking information, will they be able to fix it? Or do they have to call to have staff fix it?

Answer by Katie Dishnica: If they need to change their banking information they will have to work with a staff member. That was put in place for fraud prevention. The next update is regarding service levels. Call wait times are low. The average speed of answer was 5:35 secs. Yesterday the average was just over 4 minutes. EOTTS is also assisting with mymass.gov logins.

The maximum number of weeks has changed since the last council meeting. Per MA law, claimants are entitled to up to 30 weeks of benefits. During periods of low unemployment, it is 26 weeks. In June 2023, since the unemployment rate in all the metropolitan areas in MA was below 5.1%, the maximum number of benefit weeks was reduced to 26. Springfield has exceeded the unemployment rate of 5.1% which has now triggered the increase to 30 weeks. This is effective as of April 20, 2025, and additional weeks will be available for eligible claimants in the new EMT system.

The next update is on discharge issues due to attendance. Over the last two years, out of 745,091 approved issues, 3,875 approved discharges related to attendance. If you see trends, we can meet to discuss them further.

Questions/Discussion

Question by Chris Carlozzi: I have a new request for the future. I have seen a trend in the last two years of high weekly benefits. 25% is in the higher earnings category. Is there any data on where these claimants are from, the specific county, and the industry they come from?

Answer by Katie Dishnica: I will reach out to you after the meeting to discuss it further.

Presentation by Susan Saulnier, Director of UI Performs

Susan Saulnier is the Director of UI Performs, or USDOL's term for the federally mandated audit programs. The largest audit group is Benefits Accuracy and Measurement or BAM. The data from BAM determines the improper payment rate. The Payment Integrity Information Act of 2019 (PIIA) was signed into law March 2020 to decrease the number of improper payments made by the United States Government. The improper payment rate is defined as the sum of overpayment and underpayments made to the claimant by the agency. USDOL assesses each state on the one-year and three-year average with the PIAA year that goes from July to June. The rate is determined by the outcomes of the BAM program. The BAM program is a statistical survey and audit program used to identify and support resolutions of deficiencies in the state's unemployment insurance (UI) system and is also used to estimate state UI improper payments to be reported to DOL.

BAM was developed as a quality program for states to identify rates of success and deficiency not as a national program to assess adherence to federal CORE measures. There is not a federal CORE measure for state improper payment rates but there is a core measurement that overpayments must be less than 10%. Readers are strongly cautioned not to compare one state's payment accuracy rate to another state's rates. No two states' written laws, regulations, and policies specifying eligibility conditions are identical, and differences in these conditions influence the potential for error.

A chart was displayed showing Massachusetts PIIA data from: CY 2023 QTR 4 to CY 2024 QTR 3. The overpayment rate percentage includes the work search rate percentage.

Question by Rich Marlin: Is this people who aren't doing the work search or aren't filling in the form properly on the DUA website?

Answer by Susan Saulnier: It is a combination of everything. Changes are being made to the online system. When a claimant is selected for a BAM audit, BAM requests the claimant's work search log to verify work search attempts. Most of this comes from individuals who after the fact cannot prove they engaged in work search activities.

Three major factors that affect the state's improper payments include detection of overpayments, the state size and economy, and individual state law, regulation, policy and interpretations (LRPI). The goal is to detect overpayments and prevent them from being included in the improper payment rate.

Each state adheres to federal unemployment law but then develops individual state law, regulation, policy and interpretations of the law (LRPI). The stringency of these provisions impacts on the improper payment rate. Massachusetts LRPI are a more complex and nuanced group of provisions than most other states.

A LRPI and work search comparison chart were displayed to compare MA to other states. Massachusetts has a clearly defined work search requirement, but other states do not.

Massachusetts continues to work and improve agency operations to decrease improper payments. Some of these efforts include data analysis of cause and party responsible for overpayment, and agency changes to reduce improper payments.

A chart was shown for PIIA year and Overpayment rate one year data for years 2018 to 2024.

The spreadsheet Data Analysis of Cause and Party Responsible for of Overpayments was displayed. Work search accounts for 40% of the overpaid dollars. That is the highest cause of overpayment. The category of claimants only had the highest percentage for

the party that caused the overpayment. Although the agency does not have control over claimant behaviors continuous work is being done to influence them.

What we see in the news can be misconstrued because a lot of this data is extremely complex.

Massachusetts understands that our improper payment rate and overpayment rate is high. We are making changes to reduce the rate. In the new EMT system, claimants will be required to enter their work search activities to submit a continued claim for payment. A robust identity verification process has been implemented. Massachusetts worked with NASWA to develop and implement an agency wide Integrity plan. These changes help prevent improper payments and allow staff to investigate other issues.

Questions/Discussion

Katie Dishnica: I want to stress that the leading causes of overpayments are work search, earnings and separation. The work search overpayment rate will improve with claimants being required to enter details of their work search in the new system. As identification issues are resolved, DUA can focus on eligibility fraud which includes working while collecting unemployment insurance benefits. Staff will also be given additional training. BAM is an important program to help us improve. If the Council thinks it is helpful, when we get to a point where we are sampling cases from the new system, we can do a follow-up presentation.

Wendy Filosi: One of the areas where we struggle is with Employer Response to questionnaires to verify earnings. The employer may not be a base period employer or may be confused as to why they need to respond. If DUA does not get a response, we may not be able determine the claimant ineligible. The response is important in detecting overpayments.

UI Trust Fund Update

Lisa Hemmerle Director of Economic Research provided the UI Trust Fund Update through April 30th, 2025.

- The UI Trust Fund ending balance as of April 30 was \$1.66B.
- YTD through April 30 preliminary employer contributions totaled \$999.29M.
- YTD through April 30 DUA paid \$867.31M for 330,607 initial and continuing claims.

Questions/Discussion

Question by Rich Marlin: Nonprofits are allowed to be a pay as you go system?

Katie Dishnica: Nonprofits can be reimbursable, correct.

Question by Rich Marlin: Given all the news regarding our hospitals and universities, do we know what percentage of non-profits are reimbursable vs. in the system? Is there any way of anticipating all the layoffs that are hitting those sectors?

Katie Dishnica: We can bring it to the next meeting.

Laura Santiago: We can do an assessment but even if we look at historical data it won't give an accurate picture.

**Next meeting June 12, 2025, 9:30am, due to the holiday the following Thursday.
Please let Katie or Sara know if you are unable to attend.**