



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Food Assistance Available for Out-of-Work Pennsylvanians with Federal Unemployment Programs Ending Soon

Harrisburg, PA – With two federal pandemic unemployment programs set to expire at the end of this month, the Departments of Labor & Industry (L&I) and Agriculture want Pennsylvanians to know there are additional state programs available, including food assistance. Both the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) programs will end December 31 if Congress fails to pass an extension.

“If the federal PUA and PEUC programs are allowed to end, approximately 500,000 Pennsylvanians will abruptly lose their unemployment payments,” said L&I Acting Secretary Jennifer Berrier. “Many workers unemployed due to COVID-19 have never faced unemployment hardship before and may be vulnerable to continued job loss. We want to make sure all Pennsylvanians know how to get food, especially those who are out of work and struggling with the financial impacts of COVID-19.”

The Wolf Administration has made addressing food security a top priority. The Department of Agriculture funded processing and distribution of more than four million pounds of surplus food sourced from Pennsylvania farmers through its Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS) in 2020, adding \$10 million of federal CARES Act funding to \$1.5 million in state funding awarded under the 2019 PA Farm Bill and renewed in the 2020-21 budget. PASS food has been distributed through [Feeding Pennsylvania](#) foodbanks to all 67 counties.

Pennsylvania invested \$10 million of CARES Act funding in the Fresh Food Financing Initiative COVID-19 Relief Fund to increase the capacity of food retailers serving people of color in low-income communities, where fresh, nutritious food is less accessible and the pandemic has had a greater impact.

“Before COVID-19, nearly one in 10 Pennsylvanians were at risk of hunger,” Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding said. “The pandemic has added more than 630,000 people to the growing number of our friends and neighbors who may not know where their next meal is coming from, increasing demand on the state’s charitable food system exponentially. We have worked hard to position our food producers and charitable food network to meet increased demand, but if Congress doesn’t act to restore benefits and enact relief, demand may continue to increase beyond our capacity to help.”

Other state resources include human service programs, health services, emergency food assistance, school feeding programs and other public assistance. Find food assistance in your community and actions the administration has taken to address food insecurity at agriculture.pa.gov/foodsecurity.

Applications for SNAP, Medicaid, and other public assistance programs can be submitted online at www.compass.state.pa.us.

The annual Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) application process for the 2020-21 season is now open and lasts until April 9, 2021. Administered by the Department of Human Services, LIHEAP provides assistance for renters’ and homeowners’ home heating bills so low-income Pennsylvanians can stay warm and safe during the winter months. The minimum cash benefit that can be received is \$200 and the maximum is \$1000, and the crisis maximum – the benefit for people who meet the poverty limits and are in jeopardy of having their heating utility service terminated – is \$800.

Pennsylvanians who need assistance are encouraged to apply for LIHEAP and other public assistance programs online at www.compass.state.pa.

Those who prefer to submit paper documentation for SNAP, Medicaid, LIHEAP, or other public assistance programs can print from the website or request an application by phone at 1-800-692-7462 and mail it to their [local County Assistance Office \(CAO\)](#) or place it in a CAO's secure drop box, if available. You do not need to know your own eligibility in order to apply. While CAOs remain closed, work processing applications, determining eligibility, and issuing benefits continues. Clients should use COMPASS or the MyCOMPASS PA mobile app to submit necessary updates to their case files while CAOs are closed.

Pennsylvanians who need health insurance who do not qualify for Medicaid can explore coverage options through Pennie, the commonwealth's health insurance exchange. Pennsylvanians can learn more at www.pennie.com.

PUA and PEUC were created by Congress in March as part of the federal CARES Act in response to an unprecedented surge in national unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Because PUA is a program created for unemployed Americans who do not qualify for other types of unemployment, these claimants are especially vulnerable if Congress fails to pass an extension before December 31.

"L&I will continue to strenuously advocate for a continuation or replacement of the federal pandemic unemployment programs because we know how vital this support is to Pennsylvanians and their families," added Berrier. "If Congress acts, we are prepared to quickly and efficiently implement an extension or a new program to help out-of-work Pennsylvanians."

For more information on public assistance programs, visit www.dhs.pa.gov. For the latest pandemic-related information for individuals, families, businesses and schools, visit "Responding to COVID-19" on pa.gov.