

FSM Information Services

Public Service Announcement

ATTENTION FSM CITIZENS: Lost Your Job Due to COVID-19? Here's How You Can Apply for the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program

PALIKIR, Pohnpei—On June 17th, 2020, the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) opened offices in each of the Nation's States to assist citizens who have lost their job, or suffered from reduced income, due to COVID-19, to apply for financial support under the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) Program. A result of the Enduring Partnership between the FSM and the United States of America, and codified through an agreement between the FSM Department of Finance & Administration and the U.S. Department of Labor, this release seeks to inform affected citizens on how they can apply for PUA Program assistance, as well as its related Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) Program. Both programs, though operated by the FSM, are funded through the United States and, as a result, the Nation is following both U.S. Federal law, as well as the laws of the U.S. State of Hawaii, to implement these Programs.

The PUA program provides temporary benefits to individuals whose employment or self-employment has been lost or interrupted as a direct result of COVID-19. Examples of individuals who may qualify for assistance are: those who are unable to reach their place of employment because of a quarantine imposed as a direct result of the COVID-19 Pandemic; those who are scheduled to commence employment but do not have a job or are unable to reach their job due as a direct result of the COVID-19 Pandemic; and those whose places of employment have closed as a direct result of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The first step towards assessing if you qualify for PUA and FPUC Program assistance is to visit the OPUA website under the link provided below, visit one of the FSM Offices of Pandemic Unemployment Assistance or call the OPUA hotline. For the online portal, the link is here: <http://www.dofa.gov.fm/pandemic-unemployment-assistance-program/>

For residents of Yap State, the FSM PUA Office is located at the YCA Building, upstairs and near the FSM Treasury Field Office. Their phone number is (691) 350-2725.

For residents of Chuuk State, the FSM PUA Office is located in the L5 Building. Their TEMPORARY phone number is (691) 330-3633.

For residents of Pohnpei State, the FSM PUA Office is located in the AYS Building, directly across from the Pohnpei State Government Complex's driveway. Their phone number is (691) 320-4861.

For residents of Kosrae State, the FSM PUA Office is located in the Kosrae Capital Building's ground floor. Their phone number (691) 370-7077.

All Offices of PUA can also be contacted via email at opua@gov.fm

The second step to assess if you qualify for PUA would be to complete the PUA Initial Application form. This form requires the applicant to fill out essential information about their identity and their previous employment, including a detailed explanation for how the loss of their job is causally related to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The form can be obtained at PUA offices and also can be found online here: <https://dofa.gov.fm/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Initial-Application-for-PUA.pdf>

PUA covers the period beginning for the week ending February 8th, 2020 and ending on the week ending December 26th, 2020. However, the duration of PUA benefits is limited to 39 weeks per any individual. Payments will be made retroactively to the time an individual's unemployment began, i.e. if you lost your job in February, but you apply in June, you may still be eligible to receive assistance for the months of February, March, April, and May.

The maximum weekly benefit amount for the FSM is 166 USD per week. Available earnings might be deducted from that amount. Individuals who receive at least one-dollar (\$1) of PUA benefits for a week will also receive an additional six hundred dollar (\$600) payment under the FPUC Program. However, the FPUC is only payable between April 3rd, 2020 to July 31st, 2020.

To be eligible for PUA, the applicant must provide self-certification that he or she is able to work and available for work. PUA is not payable to workers who have voluntarily quit their place of employment. Applicants must be citizens of the FSM or the United States or holding a satisfactory immigration status.

After filing a PUA application, a review and check will be conducted by OPUA and the Department of Finance and Administration to determine the eligibility. Each applicant will be provided with a Notice of Determination which will inform the individual if they were successful or not. PUA beneficiaries must file a weekly claim at the OPUA office in order to continue receiving the benefits.

An individual who files a PUA application, but is determined to be ineligible to receive assistance, has a right to appeal. All detailed information on how the PUA Program works, eligibility, your entitlements, and your rights of appeal are provided in the Benefit Rights Information pamphlet which is provided together with the Notice of Determination.

Because the PUA and FPUC Programs are sourced from the United States, and the FSM is following the laws of the U.S. Government as well as the Government of the U.S. State of Hawaii, it is crucial that all applicants are truthful and transparent in their application form. Only individuals who have lost their jobs, or have reduced hours or income, as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic are eligible to receive assistance under the PUA and FPUC Programs. Under the U.S. laws the FSM is following to implement these Programs it is deemed fraud if misleading information is included in a form.

“My fellow Micronesians,” President Panuelo said in a statement, “If you have lost your job or suffered reduced hours or income as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, I encourage you to seek assistance through the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program. There is no need to be shy; these are unprecedented and challenging times, and we have every intention of making sure that every eligible recipient receives assistance. Please call or visit your local Office of Pandemic Unemployment Assistance soonest so that we can help you with your application.”

Citizens keen to review the Presidential Order providing the legal framework for the PUA and FPUC programming may find it here:

http://gov.fm/files/Presidential%20Orders/PO_amending_EO_No_1_2008_Office_of_PUA_.pdf

For more information on PUA and FPUC programming, visit this page at the Department of Finance & Administration’s website: <http://www.dofa.gov.fm/pandemic-unemployment-assistance-program/>