



Rhode Island Department of Human Services

25 Howard Avenue, Building 57

Cranston, RI 02920

Phone: (401) 462-2121 Fax: (401) 462-6594

December 18, 2023

The Honorable Patricia A. Serpa
Chair, House Committee on Oversight
State House, Room 101
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chair Serpa:

Please accept the attached report as the state's most recent update on the RIBridges system, which covers the reporting period November 16, 2023 – December 15, 2023. This document provides monthly updates on the following topics:

- System Performance and Improvement
- RI Department of Human Services (DHS) Employee Training
- Pending Applications
- SNAP Timeliness and Lobby/DHS Call Center Summaries
- CCAP Off-Cycle Payments
- Correspondence with Federal Partners (if any)

We appreciate your continued advocacy on behalf of those we serve, your interest in the health of the RIBridges system and the progress made to address outstanding issues. Please contact me should you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Merolla-Brito".

Kimberly Merolla-Brito, Director
RI Department of Human Services



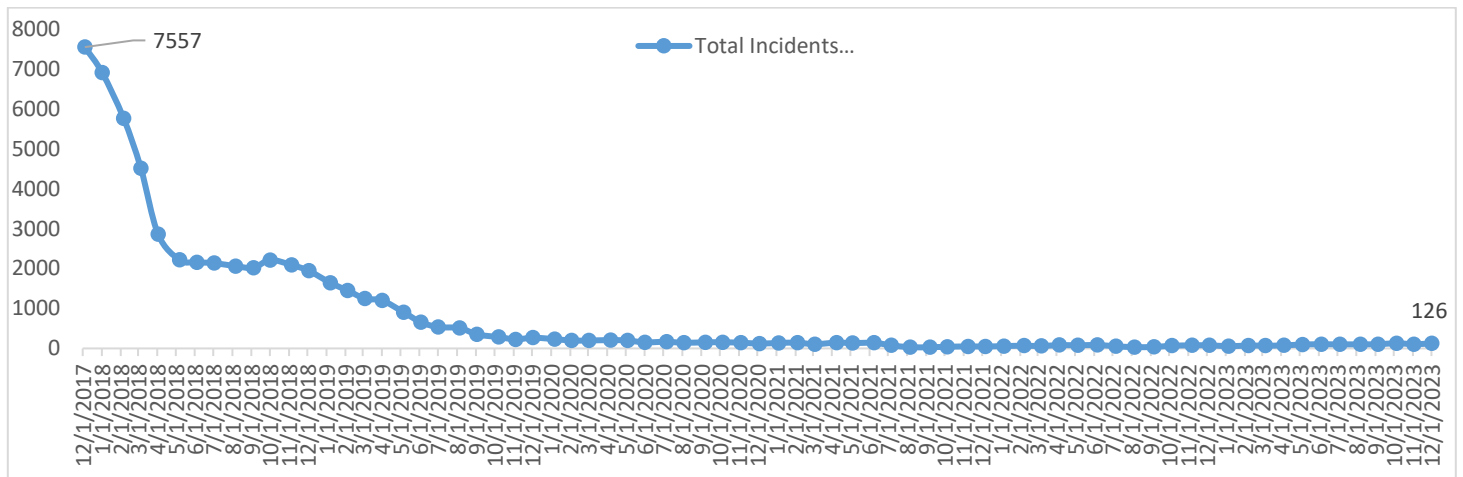
RIBridges: Monthly Update

December 2023

Our team takes its charge seriously in promoting health, nurturing quality of life and being there for Rhode Islanders when needed. Our oversight of the work on the RIBridges system is an important part of the equation. System stabilization and efficiency remains a priority for DHS, and we continue our focus on ensuring full system compliance. This report provides an update on our efforts and progress to date.

SYSTEM PERFORMANCE + IMPROVEMENT

Due to a focused effort on consistent and stable system operations, the number of new and existing incidents (when the system does not operate as expected for a DHS customer, worker or provider) has decreased by 98 percent since December 2017. As of December 1, 2023, there were 126 open incidents. While the current open incidents represent minor technical bugs discovered within RIBridges, this total is partially impacted by the Rhode Island Works (RIW) technical discrepancy referenced later in this report that has no impact on the customer experience. Open incidents can also be indicative of other factors such as updates having unintended bugs and system enhancements helping flag new discrepancies, which collectively helps the agency make improvements to the system. DHS will continue to closely monitor open incidents.



DHS STAFFING

DHS continues to progress in hiring candidates for identified critical positions. Since the last report in November, DHS hired 13 employees who have started in their new roles, which are listed below. From January 1, 2022, to December 15, 2023, DHS filled a cumulative total 392 positions through a combination of promotional opportunities, lateral transfers, and new hires.

Positions filled since November report:

- 2 Eligibility Technician I
- 4 Customer Service Aide
- 1 Supervising Eligibility Technician
- 2 Employment Career and Advisor
- 1 Eligibility Technician II(lobby)
- 2 Social Caseworker
- 1 Senior Casework Supervisor

DHS TRAINING
Training Overview

Training Topic	Training Date	# Of Training Hours	# Of New Staff	# Of Current Staff
Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) Office Hours (1- one hour session)	11-15-2023	1	0	22
Rhode Island Works Learning Series (1 – full day session)	11-16-2023	5	0	20
Department Of Labor and Training Interface Walkthrough (2 – full day session)	11-16-2023 12-5-2023	10	0	23
Child Care Assistance Program Office Hour (1 – one-hour session)	11-16-2023	1	0	19
PARIS Interface Walkthrough (1 – two-hour session)	11-17-2023 12-14-2023	2	0	29
Customer Service Aid Learning Series (2 – full day sessions)	11-18-2023 thru 11-19-2023	10	5	0
SNAP Office Hours (2 – one-hour session)	11-22-2023 12-13-2023	2	0	16
STAR Supervisor Learning Series (5 – three-hour sessions)	12-1-2023 thru 12-15-2023	15	0	12
New Hire Orientation (2 – full day sessions)	12-4-2023 thru 12-5-2023	10	15	0
Immigration Learning Session (1 – three-hour session)	12-5-2023	3	0	24
Rhode Island Works Office Hour (1 – one-hour session)	12-5-2023	1	0	17
SNAP Learning Series: Sessions 1-8 (8 – full day sessions)	12-7-2023 thru 12-19-2023	40	14	1
MMIS Interface Walkthrough (1 – two-and-half hour session)	12-8-2023	2.5	0	16
Holiday Survival Guide (1 – one-hour session)	12-8-2023	1	0	5
Community Medicaid Learning Series (4 – full day sessions)	12-11-2023 thru 12-15-2023	20	11	7
Appeals for ETs Learning Session (1 – three-hour session)	12-14-2023	3	0	8
Appeals for Supervisors Learning Session (1 – three-hour session)	12-14-2023	3	0	17
40 Quarters Learning Session (1 – two-hour learning session)	12-15-2023	2	0	15
	Totals	131.5	45*	251*
Note: the asterisk number included projected attendance to trainings that have been scheduled and staff are registered to attend				

Self-Directed Learning: Learning Management System			
	Course Title	Number of staff Enrolled	Number of Staff Completed
<p>Rhode Island Learning Center Trainings (These trainings are self-directed)</p> <p>* This number is duplicated. Our participants are enrolled in various trainings.</p>	FTI-2023	1038	548
	HIPAA, and Confidentiality-2023	1038	562
	Asset Verification System	149	120
	Claims Collection Recovery Unit	254	124
	Customer Portal	360	259
	Community Medicaid: Supplemental AVS Video	102	61
	Domestic Violence 101	325	217
	Medical Renewal Refresher	282	185
	OCSS: Child Support Refresher Process	284	184
	Sept. 22 Knowledge Transfer 7.40	453	221
	Sept. 22 Knowledge Transfer 7.41	458	218
	Nov. 22 Knowledge Transfer	359	176
	Dec. 22 Knowledge Transfer	355	197
	March 2023 Knowledge Transfer	357	200
	April 2023 Knowledge Transfer	367	195
	June 2023 Knowledge Transfer	371	155
	July 2023 Knowledge Transfer	359	131
	August 2023 Knowledge Transfer	360	128
	Sept. 2023 Knowledge Transfer	360	242
	Oct. 2023 Knowledge Transfer	357	194
	Dec. 2023 Knowledge Transfer	355	80
	RIW Miniseries	203	143
	RIBridges: Case Maintenance	365	247
	RIBridges: Case Notes Refresher	348	227
	RIBridges: Scheduling Refresher	398	257
	RIBridges: Visit Record	458	267
	SNAP: Reinvestment Updates	354	174
	SNAP: Eligibility Determination	271	195
	SNAP: ABAWD	332	212
	SNAP: ABAWD Refresher	301	231
	SNAP: ESAP	358	255
	VCC: EAD Telephonic Signature	262	39
	VCC: LTSS Telephonic Signature	57	21
VCC: Telephonic Signature	286	134	
VCC: Call Back Functionality	130	71	
	Totals	12,466*	6,870*

Training Descriptions

New Hire Orientation: The goal of the session is to provide new employees with all the pertinent information they need to begin working at DHS and to familiarize them with organizational policies and procedures. Besides introducing employees to the RIBridges system, participants learn:

- The organizational hierarchy
- DHS's mission and vision
- A broader understanding of DHS programs and services
- Policies and procedures regarding payroll, dress code, and other practices
- Rules, regulations, and laws surrounding Federal Tax Information (FTI), Civil Rights, Voter Registration, and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)
- Basic navigation and data collection training in RIBridges

Rhode Island Works (RIW) Office Hours: RIW Office Hours provide staff with an open forum to ask general system, policy, or case specific questions related to RIW cases they are processing.

Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) Office Hours: CCAP Office Hours provide an open forum for staff to ask general system and policy questions or case-specific questions related to child care that are being processed.

From Arrival to Integration: Learning Immigration Laws for Newcomers Training: This session provides an opportunity to collaborate and engage in discussions with experts and professionals in the field of immigrant and refugee services to gain insights and best practices for screening and determining eligibility for public assistance. Participants gain an understanding of the refugee resettlement processing, resettlement services in Rhode Island, the various immigration statuses, demographic trends, cultural perspectives, and available resources for refugees and immigrants offered through the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).

Appeals Learning Session (ET and Supervisor): This virtual learning class is designed for supervisors, senior supervisors, and all eligibility technicians, with a focus on the appeals process in RIBridges. Specifically, participants discuss the process for when a customer (or authorized representative) submits an appeal and have a fair hearing if they believe their eligibility determination is incorrect.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Office Hours: SNAP Office Hours provide an open forum for staff to ask general system and policy questions. In addition, staff are encouraged to ask case specific questions for cases they are processing. This training helps improve staff knowledge and proficiency around SNAP.

Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) office hours: LTSS office hours are led by Rose Leandre, LTSS Administrator. LTSS social case worker supervisors, eligibility technicians, and supervisors who are processing LTSS applications are encouraged to attend. Participants are encouraged to bring questions related to LTSS case processing and any recent updates made to the special circumstances and level of care pages for the LTSS program.

SNAP Learning Series: The SNAP Training Series is designed to introduce new Eligibility Technicians to SNAP program policies and the RIBridges system. Through this series, participants learn about the application process, navigating the menus in RIBridges, reviewing eligibility results, updating cases, interviewing customers and more.

RIW Learning Series: This RIW training provides participants with an in-depth knowledge of program policy and system knowledge. Training includes an overview of the Office of Child Support Services, motivational interviewing and CCAP. Participants are required to attend all training sessions.

Interface Walkthroughs Sessions: These sessions are designed for staff members, new and experienced, looking to build their understanding and capacity on the most used interfaces when processing a case in RIBridges. Sessions are offered for PARIS, BENDEX, 40 Quarters, and MMIS interfaces.

Holiday Survival Guide: In this seminar, participants examine sources of holiday stress and learn strategies for coping and managing their emotions, time, relationships, and finances. Participants share ideas to help organize holiday tasks to help them remain efficient in other areas, such as work responsibilities.

Community Medicaid learning Series: Through these full day sessions, participants gain an understanding of the difference between two Medicaid coverage groups and eligibility requirements for community Medicaid. Participants also learn to integrate learning concepts within RIBridges, learn to interpret Medicaid eligibility results, and explore health plan enrollments at Managed Care Organizations (MCO).

Customer Service Aid Learning Series: The Customer Service Aide (CSA) training, facilitated over two full-day sessions, provide participants with an introduction and overview of CSA job responsibilities. It also provides a summary of the different DHS programs, an overview of the backend of the system, and an outline of the front and back-office functions. With an overview of processing applications and expedited SNAP, this session also covers case association, scanning, scheduling appointments, and asset verification.

STAR Supervisor Learning Series: The STAR Supervisor Training Series is designed for supervisors to enhance their leadership, coaching, and mentoring skills. In addition, the learning series introduces new tools to help supervisors identify behavioral styles while also supporting a culture of continuous improvement.

PENDING NEW APPLICATIONS

The state continues to prioritize access to benefits. As of December 10, 2023, the total number of pending new applications across all programs was 5,022. The total overdue, pending applications awaiting state action has improved from November 2023, reflecting an approximate 8 percent decrease. This highlights the impact of effective operational changes despite challenges associated with shifts in federal policies and the ongoing Medicaid Redetermination work. While pending caseload figures are closer to normal levels and still being closely monitored by DHS, some variances should be expected as the workload associated with Medicaid Redeterminations steadily increases.

With regards to RI Works (RIW), the reported caseload is an estimate based on a manually retrieved total until a system fix can be implemented, which would then accurately report information from data pulls. The technical discrepancy, expected to be fixed at a time deemed most appropriate, has no impact on the customer experience.

DHS also continues to see progress in the way that erroneous, aged and duplicate applications are excluded from the overall pending Undetermined Medical backlog. Our IT vendor and state team are continuing analysis on the existing overdue undetermined medical (1,137 cases) and prioritizing recommendations for closure, purging and merging of duplicate cases. As of December 10, DHS has seen an approximate 22% reduction from November in undetermined medical awaiting state action in part due to improved classification of these applications from technology enhancements. DHS has cleared the majority of cases needing to be archived, and the Department continues to target incomplete applications – submitted via the Customer Portal – while performing outreach to customers.

On February 8, 2023, DHS launched a pilot called Processing Wednesdays intended to prioritize call center staff to process applications, update customer files, complete reports and other operational tasks, which supports efforts to reduce the backlog. All regional offices remain open with regular services available according to their posted schedule.

As of this report's submission date, DHS continues to see more cases completed or worked on Processing Wednesdays when compared to cases worked on regular processing days (about 100 cases) prior to launch. Importantly, for the week of Thanksgiving, call center staff focused on processing documents and other back-office tasks on Friday instead of Wednesday – not reflected in the automated data download chart below. Nevertheless, DHS continued to see an improvement in reducing its backlog, aided with the support of Processing Wednesdays.

DHS’s operational adjustments and initiatives, such as Processing Wednesdays, have contributed to an approximate 60% reduction¹ in overdue pending applications awaiting state action since January 2023. Please refer to the chart below for the latest available data regarding the pilot and caseload.

TASKS COMPLETED ON WEDNESDAYS



The top bar graph represents tasks completed on a Wednesday. Please note processing day for the week of Thanksgiving holiday occurred on Friday, Nov. 24, which is not reflected in the auto-generated report. The public was notified of this change in schedule through the virtual call center and the DHS webpage. The bar graph at the bottom represents the number of available Call Center staff for the specified Processing Wednesday.

	Not Overdue			Overdue			Total
	Client	State	Total	Client	State	Total	Grand Total
SNAP Expedited	80	333	413	7	41	48	461
SNAP Non-Expedited	489	329	818	45	57	102	920
CCAP	12	147	159	8	70	78	237
GPA Burial	1	17	18	0	1	1	19
SSP	0	101	101	0	1	1	102
GPA	34	102	136	2	6	8	144
*RIW	106	132	238	83	51	134	372
Undetermined Medical	28	500	528	76	1137	1213	1741
Medicaid-MAGI	23	38	61	18	41	59	120
Medicare Premium Payments	9	270	279	4	32	36	315
Medicaid Complex	9	124	133	13	214	227	360
LTSS	7	166	173	1	57	58	231
Grand Total	798	2259	3057	257	1708	1965	5022

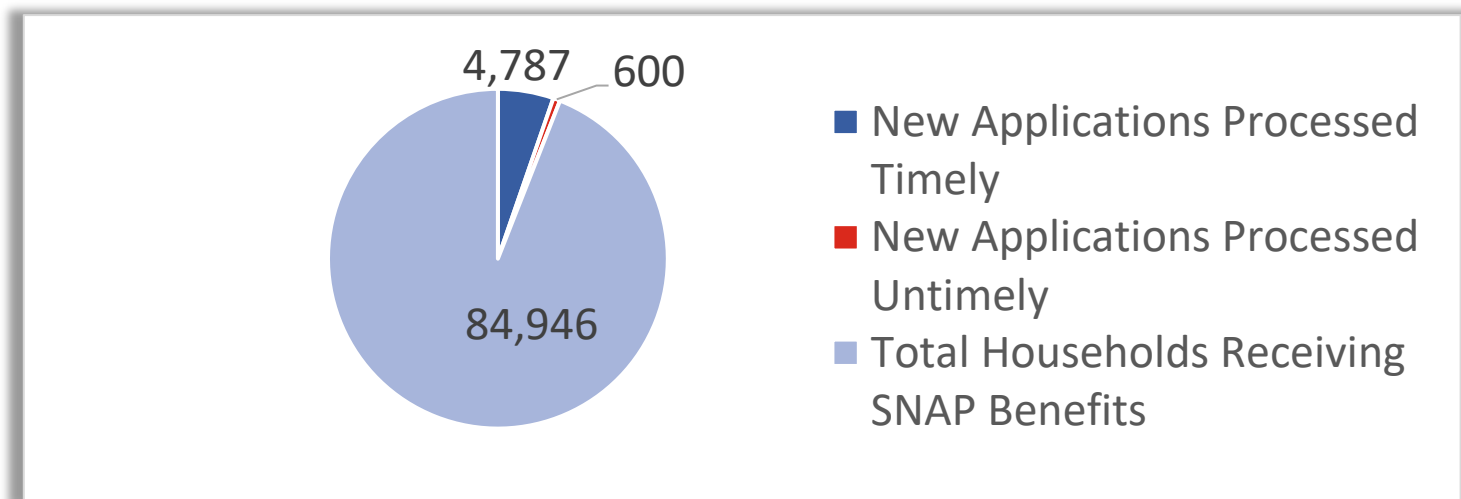
Analysis continues on the existing overdue undetermined medical (1,137 cases) and the state team and vendor are prioritizing recommendations for closure, purging and merging of duplicate cases. DHS is also targeting incomplete applications submitted via the Customer Portal.

***This is an estimate as of December 10, 2023, of pending applications for RI Works and is subject to change.**

¹ January 2023 (4,274) to December 2023 (1,708) pending applications awaiting state action declined by 2,566 cases, which is a 60% reduction from 4,274.

SNAP TIMELINESS

In November 2023, **84,946** households received benefits. Approximately, **89** percent of new SNAP applications were processed in a timely manner. Approximately 11 percent of new applications were processed untimely. Importantly, cases awaiting customer or state action may become overdue, leading to the untimely authorization of benefits that is not reflective of the overall customer experience.



CALL CENTER

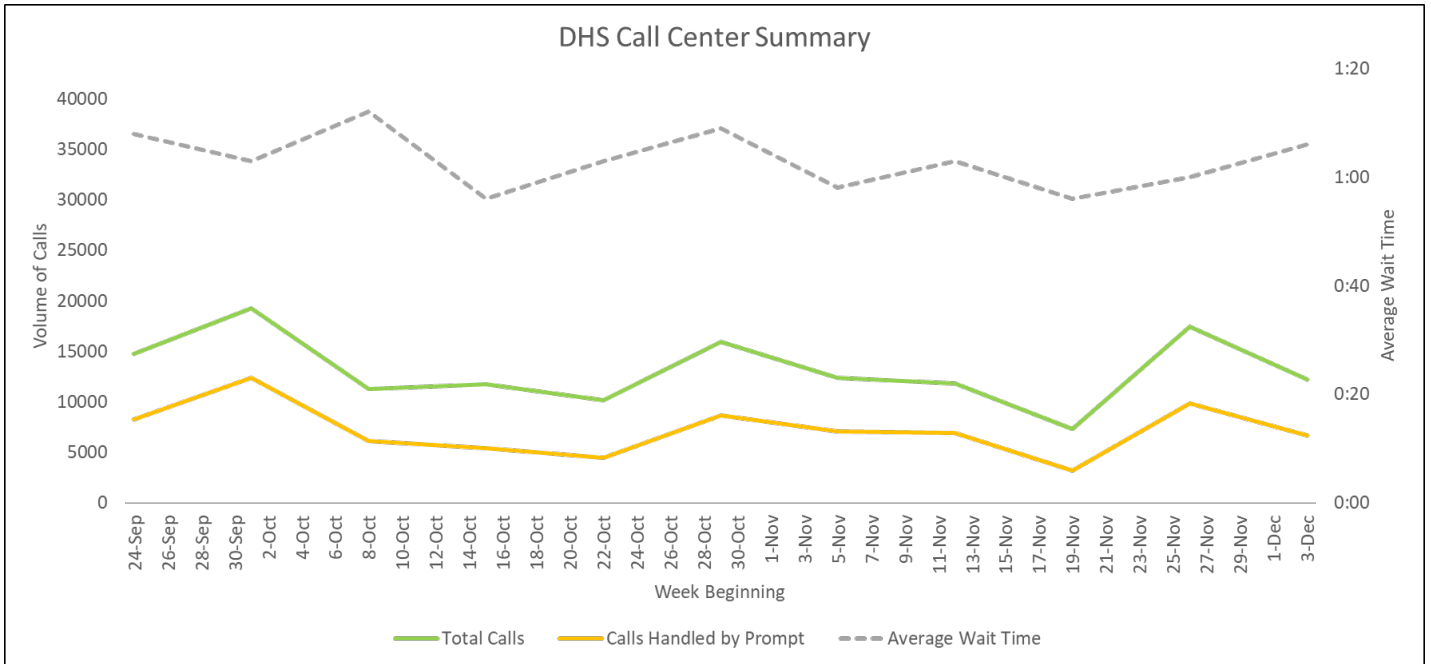
For the weeks beginning October 29, 2023, and December 3, 2023, the average wait time to connect to DHS staff was approximately **1 hour and 2 minutes**. DHS recognizes this average wait time remains longer than it should be, and the agency has implemented several initiatives to improve efficiencies.

DHS's call back functionality, available strategically in the morning, helps reduce the time customers wait on the phone. Customers who choose to use this functionality typically wait less than 20 minutes on the phone and are assisted the same day. Customers may experience longer than usual wait times during high call volume days if they are not able or do not choose to opt into the implemented call back functionality. The call back functionality is available to customers across all programs.

Additionally, to assist with managing increased Medicaid call volume, on August 15, 2023, DHS launched a pilot to support Medicaid Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI) callers by routing appropriate Medicaid calls from the DHS Call Center to the HSRI contact center. Initial reports are showing faster customer service through decreased wait time for MAGI callers. Additionally, the DHS has continued to see more customers take advantage of the self-service options to access SNAP and Medicaid benefit data, first deployed in May 2023.

The busiest week at the Call Center was the week beginning October 1, 2023, with **17,396** calls to DHS. DHS continually monitors and reviews Call Center data to effectuate appropriate operational changes to achieve its goal of reducing wait times to 30 minutes.

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Ongoing Medicaid Redeterminations and cases involving active renewals align with call center volume and wait times.

CCAP OFF-CYCLE PAYMENTS (PENDING)

Below are the total number of batch payments made to child care providers for current reporting period through November 15, 2023.

Batch	Date Issued	# of Providers	Amount after Union/PAC removed
11	11/2/2023	555	\$2,315,561.39
11A	11/3/2023	11	\$13,281.64
11B	11/10/2023	32	\$46,819.43
11	11/16/2023	546	\$2,297,372.70
12A	11/17/2023	31	\$93,656.61
12B	11/23/2023	Skipped due to holiday	

	Providers	Payments
Total Batch (11, 11A, & 11B)	598	\$2,375,662.46
Off-cycle (11A & 11B)	43	\$60,101.07
Provider off-cycle/total	7.75%	-
Payments off-cycle/total	2.60%	-

	Providers	Payments
Total Batch (12, 12A, & 12B)	577	\$2,391,029.31
Off-cycle (12A & 12B)	41	\$93,656.61
Provider off-cycle/total	5.68%	-
Payments off-cycle/total	4.08%	-

UPDATE ON RECERTIFICATIONS PROGRESS

Medicaid recertifications began on April 1, 2023, with a cohort of approximately 9,400 recertifications sent to customers. For the month of November, DHS is processing a total of **16,924 case renewals**, with approximately **6,900 case renewals requiring action from the customer**.

Medicaid renewal cases are anticipated to steadily increase in alignment with the increase of passive renewals, which require no action from customers. DHS continues to work with numerous state agencies, MCOs, advocates, and community-based organizations to reach and inform as many affected Rhode Islanders as possible. Outreach also continues to inform families with children to be aware that renewals will start in January 2024. Households with children received renewal notices December 1 as shared during a joint [press conference](#) at Progreso Latino. The renewal progress for this population of Medicaid recipients will be reflected in the data dashboard on staycovered.ri.gov.

The Executive Office of Health and Human Services awarded mini-grants to enlist the support of community partners to reach the broadest group of Rhode Islanders, with special attention paid to those most at risk in the renewal process. Some of these groups include individuals that may have barriers to obtaining this information and those that may need assistance to complete the process.

In addition, the state has continued to update the staycovered.ri.gov website with notices, marketing collateral, and other resources such as a data dashboard to help support the Medicaid renewal process – last updated November 20. The dashboard includes key information on Medicaid enrollment and renewals, as well as updates to call Medicaid focused call volume. In May 2023, DOA awarded a contract to Deloitte to provide data processing support so that DHS eligibility technicians can focus on Medicaid redeterminations through July 2024. Currently, all temporary support staff have been recruited and onboarded to provide data processing support to the DHS Eligibility Technicians working on Medicaid Redeterminations.

CORRESPONDENCE WITH FEDERAL PARTNERS

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and the USDA Food and Nutrition Service are important partners to the state. DHS continues to communicate regularly during the monthly touchpoints to review progress made.

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