



**Rhode Island Department of Human Services**

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November 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 October 16, 2023 – November 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



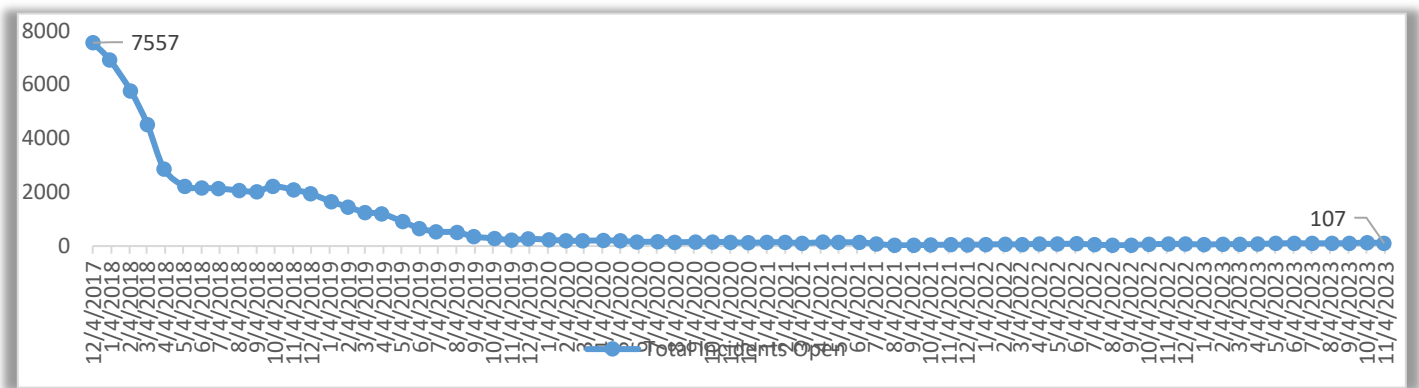
# RI Bridges: Monthly Update

## November 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 RI Bridges 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 99 percent since December 2017. As of November 5, 2023, there were 107 open incidents. While the current open incidents represent minor technical bugs discovered within RI Bridges, 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. From January 2022 through December 2022, DHS filled 196 positions through a combination of promotional opportunities, lateral transfers, and new hires. The cumulative hiring count beginning January 1, 2023, at DHS, is 183 positions. Since the last report in October, DHS hired 33 employees who have started in their new roles. These include:

- 19 Eligibility Technician I
- 2 Customer Service Aide
- 3 Supervising Eligibility Technician
- 1 Chief Implementation Aide
- 1 Customer Support Specialist
- 1 Employment Career and Advisor
- 1 Human Services Policy and Systems Specialist
- 1 Administrator and Adult Services
- 2 Senior Human Services Business Officer
- 1 Eligibility Technician III
- 1 Social Caseworker

DHS TRAINING

Training Overview

Training Topic	Training Date	# Of Training Hours	# Of New Staff	# Of Current Staff
Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI) (4 – full day sessions)	11-6-23 thru 11-10-23	20	0	17
SNAP Learning Series for Eligibility Technicians (8 – full day sessions)	10-16-23 thru 10-27-23	40	0	10
Computer Literacy: Basic Excel and Word (2 – three-hour sessions)	10-16-23	6	0	21
Compassion Fatigue (1- one-hour session)	10-17-23	1	0	16
LTSS Office Hours (2 – one-hour session)	10-18-23 11-15-23	2	0	45
Manager’s Guide to Burnout (1 – one-hour session)	10-23-23	1	0	8
The Importance of Unplugging (1 – one-hour session)	11-14-23	1	0	3
SNAP Office Hours (1 – one-hour session)	10-18-23	1	0	16
Ex Parte Learning Series (4- full day sessions)	10-16-23 thru 10-17-23 11-6-23 thru 11-7-23	20	0	36
RIW Office Hours (2 – one - hour sessions)	10-17-23 11-7-23	2	0	19
CCAP Office Hours (1 – one – hour session)	10-17-23	1	0	16
Medicaid Office Hours (1 – one-hour session)	11-14-23	1	0	9
Immigration Training (1 – two-hour session)	10-24-23	2	0	16
LTSS- ET Learning Series (5 – full day sessions)	10-19-23 thru 10-26-23	25	0	7
New Hire Orientation (3 – full day sessions)	10-31-23 thru 11-3-23	15	12	0
Multicultural Competency Learning Series: Module Two thru Four. (3 – two- hour sessions)	10-16-23; 10-23-23; and 10-30-23	6	0	10
LTSS -SCW Learning Series (4 – full day sessions)	11-2-23 thru 11-7-23	20	0	6
Appeals Learning Sessions (8 - three-hour sessions)	10-16-23 thru 10-20-23	24	0	140
October/November Quarterly Meeting (4 – three-hour sessions)	10-31-23 thru 11-3-23	12	0	322
Interface Walkthroughs (PARIS, BENDEX, DLT, 40 Quarters and MMIS) 1 full day session; 2- two-hour sessions; 1 – two- and half-hour session; and 1 – one hour session)	10-20-23; 10-23-23; 10-27- 23; 11-9-23; and 11-10-23	12.5	0	82

Psychological Safety for Supervisors (2 – three-hour sessions)	11-7-23 11-14-23	6	0	12
Rhode Island Works Learning Series (4 – full day sessions)	11-9-23 thru 11-16-23	20	0	20
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>238.5</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>831*</b>

**Note: the asterisk number included projected attendance to trainings that have been scheduled and staff are registered to attend**

<b>Self-Directed Learning: Learning Management System</b>			
	<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Number of staff Enrolled</b>	<b>Number of Staff Completed</b>
Rhode Island Learning Center Trainings (These trainings are self-directed)	FTI-2023	1011	528
	HIPAA, and Confidentiality-2023	1011	542
	Asset Verification System	149	116
	Customer Portal	362	261
	Community Medicaid: Supplemental AVS Video	100	56
	Domestic Violence 101	326	207
	Medical Renewal Refresher	283	182
	OCSS: Child Support Refresher Process	284	183
	Sept. 22 Knowledge Transfer 7.40	461	221
	Sept. 22 Knowledge Transfer 7.41	461	218
	Nov. 22 Knowledge Transfer	361	176
	Dec. 22 Knowledge Transfer	356	194
	March 2023 Knowledge Transfer	359	196
	April 2023 Knowledge Transfer	367	194
	June 2023 Knowledge Transfer	370	151
	July 2023 Knowledge Transfer	358	91
	August 2023 Knowledge Transfer	358	97
	Sept. 2023 Knowledge Transfer	360	234
	Oct. 2023 Knowledge Transfer	356	180
	RIW Miniseries	190	132
	RIBridges: Case Maintenance	367	241
	RIBridges: Case Notes Refresher	299	197
	RIBridges: Scheduling Refresher	297	203
	RIBridges: Visit Record	366	215
	SNAP: Reinvestment Updates	357	172
	SNAP: Eligibility Determination	272	195
	SNAP: ABAWD	332	208
	SNAP: ABAWD Refresher	299	228
	SNAP: ESAP	359	254
	VCC: EAD Telephonic Signature	63	24
	VCC: LTSS Telephonic Signature	53	16
	VCC: Telephonic Signature	137	46
VCC: Call Back Functionality	126	66	
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>11,210*</b>	<b>6,224*</b>

**\* This number is duplicated. Our participants are enrolled in various trainings.**

## 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.

**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.

**Medicaid Office Hours:** Medicaid Office Hours are designed to be an open forum to ask system and policy questions related to non-LTSS Medicaid cases being processed. Participants are invited to bring specific cases and/or questions for discussion where a clinical training specialist will be present.

**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 recent updates made to the special circumstances and level of care processes for the LTSS program.

**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).

**Computer Literacy Trainings:** This training provides participants with a tutorial on using Word and Excel. Aimed at helping participants understand the commands and functions available within these programs, the training program helps participants learn functions that help improve their efficiency when using these programs.

**Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI) Learning Series:** The MAGI Medicaid Learning Series provides participants with an overview of the Medicaid hierarchy, and introduction to MAGI Medicaid policy and process. The session also provides additional information to help participants familiarize them to RIBridges screens related to MAGI as well as information on inter-agency units. The learning series includes the MAGI Medicaid Learning Lab, where participants apply learning concepts

in the RIBridges production environment with support from a cross-agency team. The team is made up of staff development (trainer) and operations (supervisor) with the goal of providing hands-on experience.

**Ex Parte Learning Series:** The Ex Parte Virtual Learning Series provides participants with an overview of Ex Parte policy and the Integrated Eligibility System (IES) when an individual faces possible closure to their current Medicaid. It also describes the different forms of Medicaid that could potentially be accessed through special circumstance questions.

**Multicultural Competency Learning Series:** The Multicultural Competence Modules offer contextualized, scaffolded anti-oppression educational workshops for DHS employees. There are four foundational modules that introduce participants to frameworks, concepts, and strategies so DHS personnel are better equipped to advance its diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic goals individually and collectively. Each module is presented weekly (four weeks), and each session is 1.5-2 hours. The format for the sessions includes facilitated dialogue with individual and group activities.

**Appeals Learning Session:** This in-person training class is designed for supervisors, senior supervisors, and all eligibility technicians, with a focus on the appeals process in RIBridges. Specifically, participants will discuss the process when a customer (or authorized representative) requests an opportunity to present their case to a higher authority if they believe their eligibility determination is incorrect.

**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Training Series:** The SNAP Training Series is designed to introduce new Eligibility Technicians to SNAP program policy and RIBridges. A wide range of operational tasks are covered and/or discussed to help ensure Eligibility Technicians are prepared for the variety of questions and challenges they may encounter in their role.

**Rhode Island Works (RIW) Learning Series** - The RIW training will provide participants with an in-depth knowledge of program policy and system knowledge. Additionally, this training will include training on OCSS, 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.

**October/November Quarterly Meeting:** The quarterly meetings provide an opportunity for DHS leadership to share agency-wide updates, accomplishments, and challenges. Staff are encouraged to bring questions to the quarterlies. All staff are required to attend.

**Compassion Fatigue:** This session explores the definition of compassion fatigue, and the signs and symptoms associated with this issue. Throughout the session, participants gain real-life strategies to combat exhaustion they may be experiencing in their personal or professional life.

**Manager's Guide to Burnout:** In this presentation, managers learn how to recognize burnout in their employees, and ways to help them succeed. The strategies shared are intended to help improve the overall mental and physical wellbeing of staff, which in turn influences worker performance.

**The Importance of Unplugging:** In this session, participants learn the impact of being connected 24/7 as well as the benefits of unplugging from technology. The session provides employee tips on how to responsibly unplug from work and prioritize on other equally important parts of their life.

**Psychological Safety for Supervisors:** Psychological safety (PS) is a term used in reference to work environments that value honesty and transparency, without staff fearing repercussions. Since the pandemic began, the demand for psychological safety has increased. Interest in the concept has gained momentum in a post-pandemic society, where employees want to be able to genuinely give their thoughts without consequence, especially around sensitive topics. Psychological safety is an

important work condition that ensures employers are remaining agile to changing needs while also supporting employees' mental health. Specifically, the four levels of PS include:

- Inclusion Safety: This level satisfies the basic human need to connect and belong.
- Learner Safety: This level assists in meeting an employee's need to learn and grow.
- Contributor Safety: This level boosts confidence and aids in an employee's innate desire to contribute and make a difference.
- Challenger Safety: This level promotes a better work environment for employers and employees as it relates to the universal desire to make things better.

**LTSS – SCW Learning Series:** The purpose of this course is to provide foundational learning to LTSS social caseworkers on relevant LTSS policies and initiatives, DHS business processes, RIBridges system functionality for the most common LTSS scenarios, as well as various competencies needed to be effective as a social case worker.

#### PENDING NEW APPLICATIONS

The State continues to prioritize access to benefits. As of November 10, 2023, the total number of pending new applications across all programs was 5,452. The total overdue, pending applications awaiting State action has improved from October 2023, reflecting an approximate 14 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 later this year, which would then accurately report information from data pulls. The technical discrepancy, expected to be fixed by the end of the year, 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 (1,449 cases) and prioritizing recommendations for closure, purging and merging of duplicate cases. As of November 10, DHS has seen an approximate 20% reduction 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 November 1, 2023, DHS continues to see more cases completed or worked on Processing Wednesdays when compared to cases worked on regular Wednesdays (about 100 cases) prior to launch. The increased number of tasks completed on average, aided with the support of Processing Wednesdays, have helped reduce the backlog and directly reduced the need for customers to seek additional support by phone or in-person.

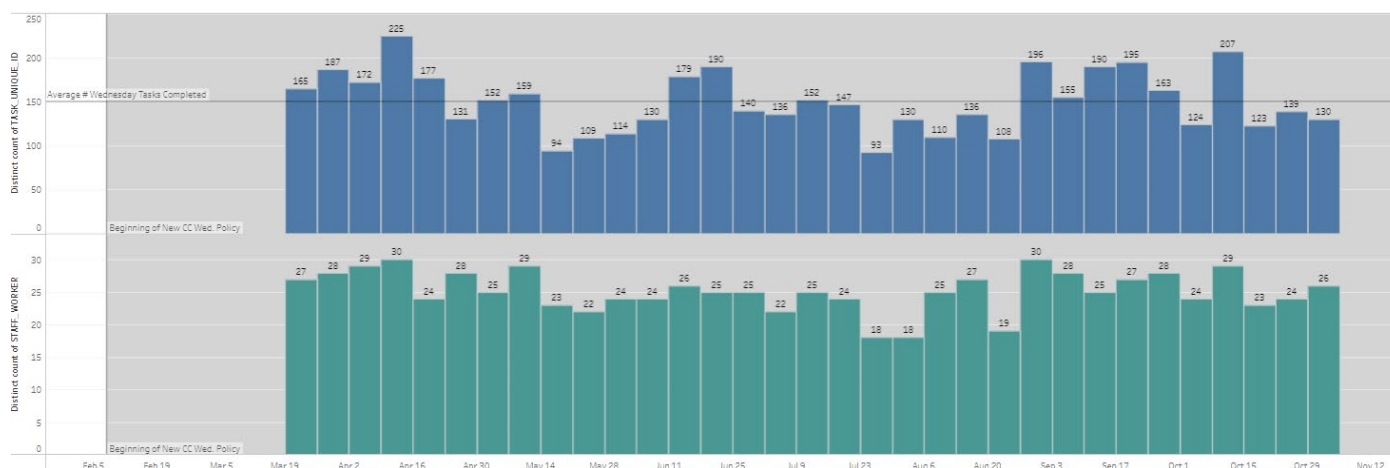
DHS's operational adjustments and initiatives, such as Processing Wednesdays, have contributed to an approximate 52% reduction<sup>1</sup> in overdue pending applications awaiting state action since January 2023. Please refer to the chart below for the latest available data regarding the pilot and caseload.

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<sup>1</sup> January 2023 (4,274) to November 2023 (2,067) pending applications awaiting state action declined by 2,207 cases, which is a 51.6% reduction from 4,274.

## TASKS COMPLETED ON WEDNESDAYS



The top bar graph represents tasks completed on a Wednesday. Please note cases worked on Processing Wednesdays for July 2023 saw a decline because eligibility technicians were attending critical training related to Long Term Services and Support (LTSS). 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
<b>SNAP Expedited</b>	52	379	431	6	35	41	472
<b>SNAP Non-Expedited</b>	536	473	1009	43	48	91	1100
<b>CCAP</b>	12	174	186	15	62	77	263
<b>GPA Burial</b>	0	24	24	0	1	1	25
<b>SSP</b>	0	99	99	0	11	11	110
<b>GPA</b>	39	90	129	6	7	13	142
<b>*RIW</b>	67	97	160	119	102	221	381
<b>Undetermined Medical</b>	34	437	471	64	1449	1513	1984
<b>Medicaid-MAGI</b>	25	41	66	27	48	75	141
<b>Medicare Premium Payments</b>	8	167	175	7	14	21	196
<b>Medicaid Complex</b>	9	107	116	9	223	232	348
<b>LTSS</b>	9	212	221	2	67	69	290
<b>Grand Total</b>	791	2300	3087	298	2067	2365	5452

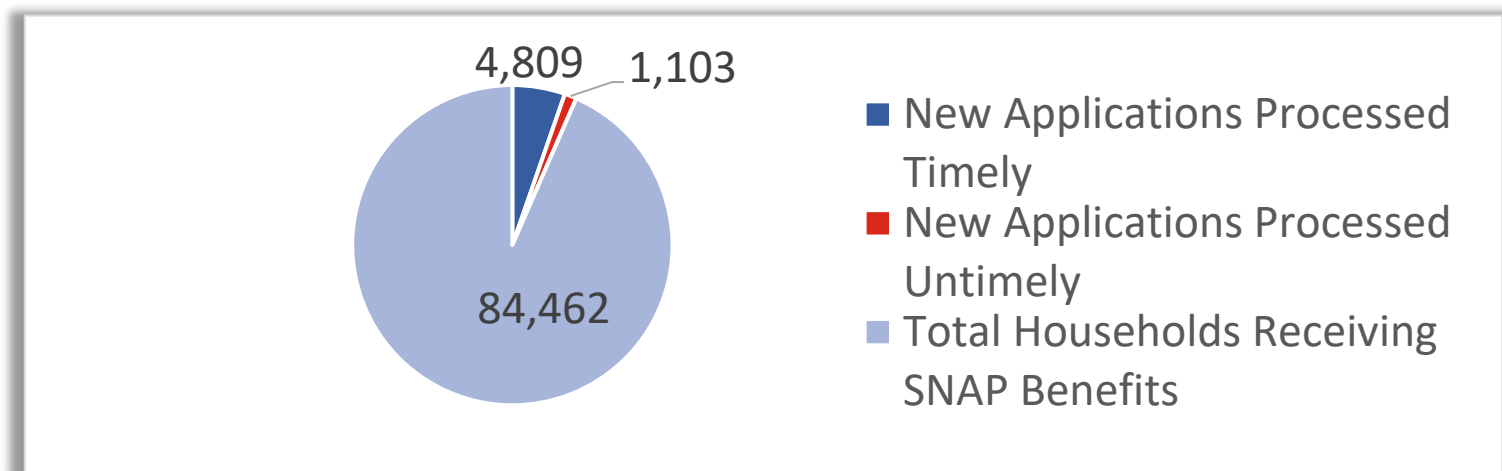
Analysis continues on the existing overdue undetermined medical (1,449 cases) and the state team and vendor are prioritizing recommendations for closure, purging and merging of duplicate cases. DHS is also targeting incomplete applications submitted via the Customer Portal.

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



## SNAP TIMELINESS

In October 2023, **84,462** households received benefits. Approximately, **81** percent of new SNAP applications were processed in a timely manner. Approximately 19 percent of new applications were processed untimely.



## CALL CENTER

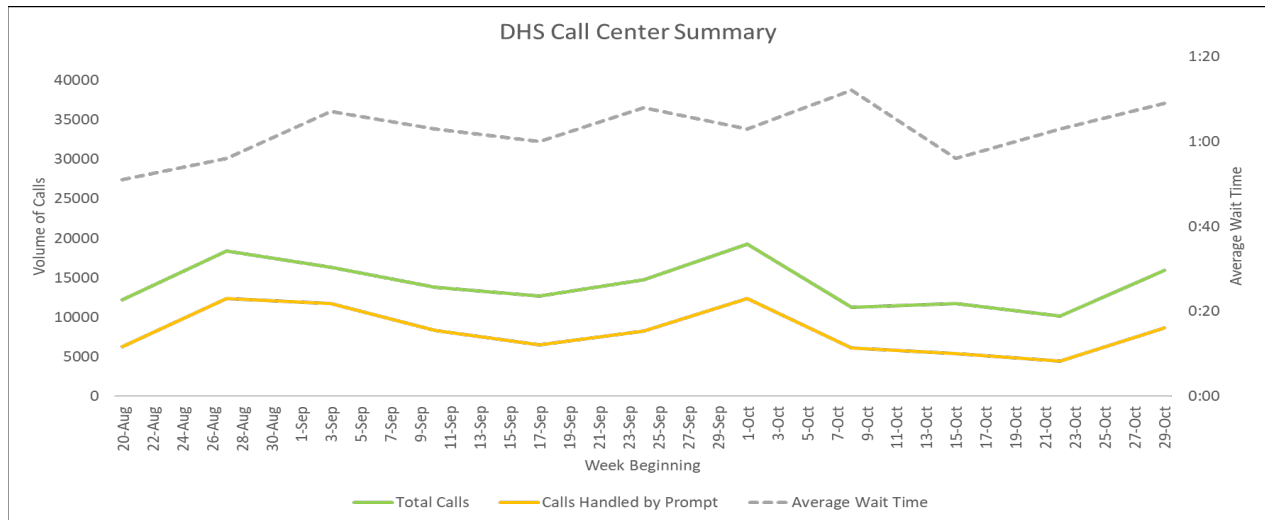
For the weeks beginning September 24, 2023, and October 29, 2023, the average wait time to connect to DHS staff was approximately **1 hour and 5 minutes**. DHS recognizes this average wait time remains longer than it should be, and the agency has implemented several initiatives to improve efficiencies.

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 **19,270** 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
9	10/5/2023	551	\$2,188,620.78
9A	10/6/2023	10	\$76,409.84
9B	10/13/2023	32	\$85,718.59
10	10/19/2023	552	\$2,228,876.11
10A	10/20/2023	27	\$77,369.15
10B	10/27/2023	33	\$84,041.59

	Providers	Payments
Total Batch (9, 9A, & 9B)	593	\$2,350,749.21
Off-cycle (9A & 9B)	42	\$162,128.43
Provider off-cycle/total	7.62%	-
Payments off-cycle/total	7.41%	-

	Providers	Payments
Total Batch (10, 10A, & 10B)	612	\$2,390,286.85
Off-cycle (10A & 10B)	60	\$161,410.74
Provider off-cycle/total	10.87%	-
Payments off-cycle/total	7.24%	-

## 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 **15,731 case renewals**, with approximately **6,700 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, Managed Care Organizations, 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 will begin receiving renewal notices by mail December 1 as shared during a joint [press conference](#) at Progreso Latino.

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](http://staycovered.ri.gov) website with notices, marketing collateral, and other resources such as a data dashboard to help support the Medicaid renewal process. 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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