



**Rhode Island Department of Human Services**

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February 16, 2024

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 January 16, 2024 – February 15, 2024. 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



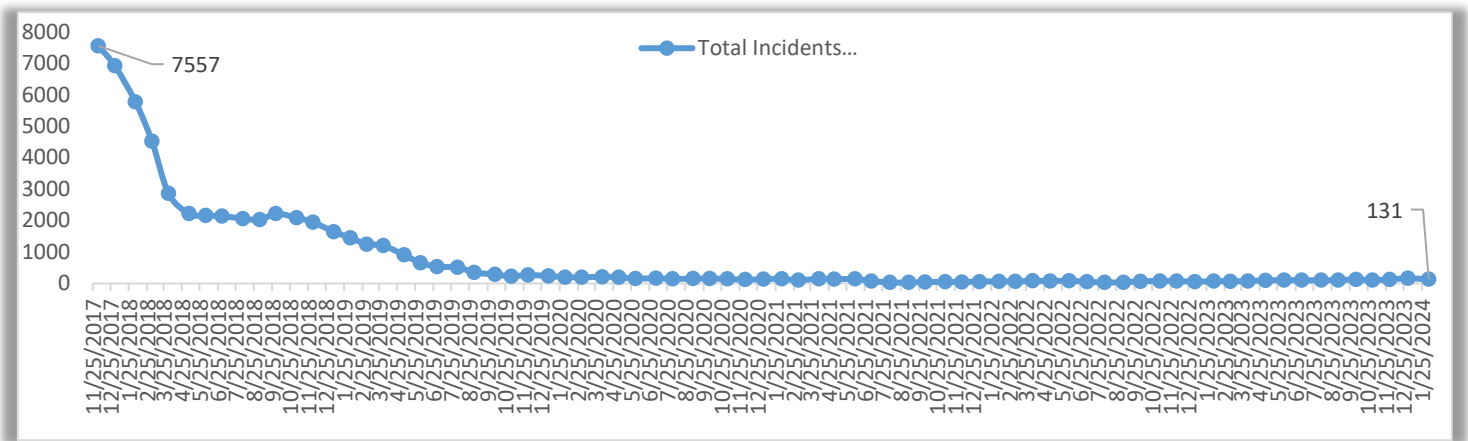
# RI Bridges: Monthly Update

## February 2024

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 98 percent since December 2017. As of February 5, 2024, there were 131 open incidents. Current open incidents represent minor technical bugs discovered within RI Bridges, inclusive of unintended bugs from system enhancements and updates, 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 2023 through December 2023, DHS filled 216 positions through a combination of promotional opportunities, lateral transfers, and new hires. The cumulative hiring count beginning January 1, 2024, at DHS, is 25 positions. Since the last report in January, DHS has hired 21 employees who have started in their new roles. These include:

- 5 Eligibility Technician
- 1 Assistant Administrator Family and Children’s Services
- 1 Employment and Career Advisor
- 1 Chief Medical Care Specialist
- 1 Administrator Management Services
- 9 Eligibility Technician II (lobby)
- 2 Social Caseworker (ESSU)
- 1 Eligibility Technician II (Call Center)

During this reporting period, DHS held a Bid Day for staff located at Barry Hall, where DHS-utilized space was vacated. Affected staff bid on available locations and assignments, in accordance with seniority per collective bargaining agreements. This includes:

- 32 Eligibility Technicians
- 1 Eligibility Technician III
- 1 Senior Casework Supervisor
- 2 Supervising Eligibility Technician

DHS TRAINING

Training Overview

Training Topic	Training Date	# Of Training Hours	# Of New Staff	# Of Current Staff
Department of Labor and Training Interface Walkthrough (DLT) (Two full one-day sessions)	1-16-2024 2-8-2024	10	7	11
Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) Office Hours (One one-hour session)	1-17-2024	1	0	22
Rhode Island Works (RIW) Office Hours (One one-hour session)	1-17-2024	1	0	7
Customer Service Aide (CSA) Learning Series (Two full day sessions)	1-18-2024 thru 1-19-2024	10	7	0
PARIS Match Interface Walkthrough (One two-hour session)	1-19-2024	2	6	6
Ex Parte Learning Series (Two full day sessions)	1-22-2024 thru 1-23-2024	10	1	8
CCAP Office Hours (One one-hour session)	1-24-2024	1	0	8
40 Quarters Interface Walkthrough (One two-hour session)	1-25-2024	2	8	5
Rhode Island Works (RIW) Learning Series (Four full day sessions)	1-25-2024 thru 1-30-2024	20	11	6
Medical Management Information System (MMIS) Interface Walkthrough (One two-hour session)	2-2-2024	2	0	12
New Hire Orientation (NHO) (Two full day sessions)	2-5-2024 thru 2-6-2024	10	6	0
Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) Office Hours (One one-hour session)	2-7-2024	1	0	25
Medicaid Office Hours (One one-hour session)	2-14-2024	1	0	12
Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) Eligibility Technician Learning Series (Five full day sessions)	2-6-2024 thru 2-13-2024	25	4	16
Community Medicaid Learning Series (Four full day sessions)	2-12-2024 thru 2-16-2024	20	1	15
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>51*</b>	<b>153*</b>

\* Includes projected attendance to trainings that have been scheduled and staff are registered to attend.

Self-Directed Learning: Learning Management System			
Rhode Island Learning Center Trainings (These trainings are self-directed)	Course Title	Number of staff Enrolled	Number of Staff Completed
	Civil Rights Annual Training	1063	221
	FTI-2023	1055	580

<b>* This number is duplicated. Our participants are enrolled in various trainings.</b>	HIPAA, and Confidentiality-2023	1055	587	
	Asset Verification System	150	121	
	Claims Collection Recovery Unit	293	160	
	Customer Portal (inactive for updates)	358	259	
	Community Medicaid: Supplemental AVS Video	127	75	
	Domestic Violence 101	357	230	
	OCSS: Child Support Refresher Process	314	200	
	Dec. 2023 Knowledge Transfer	355	80	
	Jan. 2024 Knowledge Transfer	349	166	
	RIbridges: Case Maintenance	405	263	
	RIbridges: Case Notes Refresher	379	243	
	RIbridges: Scheduling Refresher	441	274	
	RIbridges: Visit Record	500	288	
	SNAP: Reinvestment Updates	353	174	
	SNAP: Eligibility Determination	271	194	
	SNAP: ABAWD	357	224	
	SNAP: ABAWD Refresher	331	241	
	SNAP: ESAP	400	275	
	VCC: EAD Telephonic Signature	259	39	
	VCC: LTSS Telephonic Signature	66	25	
	VCC: Telephonic Signature	319	156	
VCC: Call Back Functionality	130	73		
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>9,687*</b>	<b>5,148*</b>	
<b>Inactive/retired courses</b> <b>* This number is duplicated. Our participants are enrolled in various trainings.</b>	Sept. 22 Knowledge Transfer 7.40 (retired)	471	226	
	Sept. 22 Knowledge Transfer 7.41 (retired)	460	222	
	Nov. 22 Knowledge Transfer (retired)	391	185	
	Dec. 22 Knowledge Transfer (retired)	387	204	
	March 2023 Knowledge Transfer (retired)	389	208	
	April 2023 Knowledge Transfer (retired)	402	202	
	June 2023 Knowledge Transfer (retired)	407	153	
	July 2023 Knowledge Transfer (retired)	398	137	
	August 2023 Knowledge Transfer (retired)	398	136	
	Sept. 2023 Knowledge Transfer (retired)	395	248	
	Medical Renewal Refresher (inactive for updates)	277	185	
	RIW Miniseries (inactive for updates)	205	145	
		<b>Totals</b>	<b>4,580*</b>	<b>2,251*</b>

## 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

**Child Care Assistance Program 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.

**Ex Parte Learning Series:** The Ex Parte Virtual Learning Series provides participants 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.

**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 Learning Series:** The LTSS Learning Series provides participants with an introduction and breakdown of the LTSS program and RIBridges screens related to LTSS. Participants must attend all sessions in this five-day training series to get the full scope of the knowledge and skills offered. This training is targeted for Eligibility Technicians and supervisors who process LTSS applications.

**Department of Labor and Training (DLT) Interface Walkthrough Learning Series:** This session provides participants with an overview of the DLT interface and the data provided. Through this training, participants will understand when and how to access the interface within RIBridges.

**Customer Service Aide (CSA) Learning Series:** The CSA training, facilitated over two full-day sessions, provides participants with an introduction and overview of job responsibilities. Participants also gain a broader understanding of DHS programs, the backend of the system, and 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.

**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. The learning series is intended to help participants apply concepts within RIBridges, helping participants understand how to interpret Medicaid eligibility results and understand health plan enrollment options at Managed Care Organizations.

**RI Works Learning Series:** This RI Works 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 the Child Care Assistance Program. Participants are required to attend all training sessions.

**40 Quarters Interface Walkthrough:** This session provides a general overview of the 40 Quarters Interface. The overview includes a review of the interface as well as how to access the 40 Quarters Interface within RIBridges.

**Medical Management Information System (MMIS) Interface Walkthrough:** The MMIS interface walkthrough provides a general overview of the interface, a breakdown of the data provided, and an review of how to access the interface through RIBridges.

## PENDING NEW APPLICATIONS

The state continues to prioritize access to benefits. As of February 11, 2024, the total number of pending new applications across all programs was 5,223, reflecting an approximate 1% change from January in total pending applications. The total overdue, pending applications awaiting state action declined by approximately 29%, from 1,776 to 1,260 applications. 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 to include families with children that started January 1, 2024. January saw elevated program applications from across the board (9,300 in December to 11,100 in January).

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.

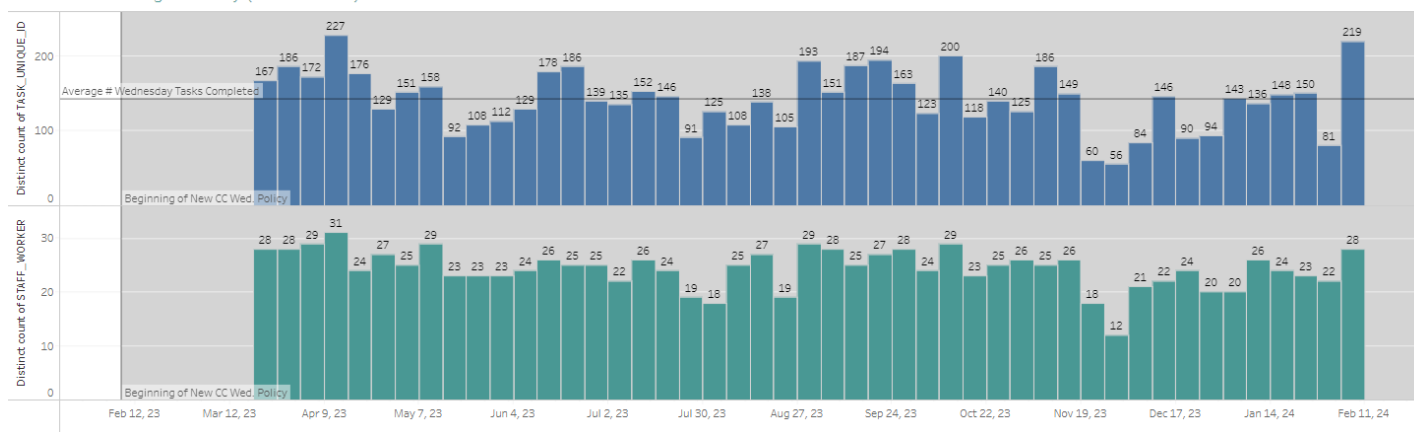
DHS also continues to see progress in the way that erroneous, aged and duplicate applications are excluded from the overall pending Undetermined Medical backlog. Our IT vendor and state team are continuing analysis on the existing overdue undetermined medical, comprised of 574 cases and reflecting an approximate 51% decrease from January 2024. DHS continues to prioritize recommendations for closure, purging and merging of duplicate cases. In addition, DHS has cleared the majority of cases needing to be archived, and DHS 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. There is a strong correlation when comparing the total number of tasks completed and number of available staff, reflected in the green bar graph below. Importantly, DHS’s operational adjustments and initiatives, such as Processing Wednesdays, have contributed to an approximate 71% 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 pending applications.

## TASKS COMPLETED ON WEDNESDAYS

RI Bridges Distinct Tasks Completed on Wednesdays (Contact Center Team Only)  
 # of Staff Working That Day (Lower Chart)



The top bar graph represents tasks completed on a Wednesday. The bar graph at the bottom represents the number of available Call Center staff for the specified Processing Wednesday.

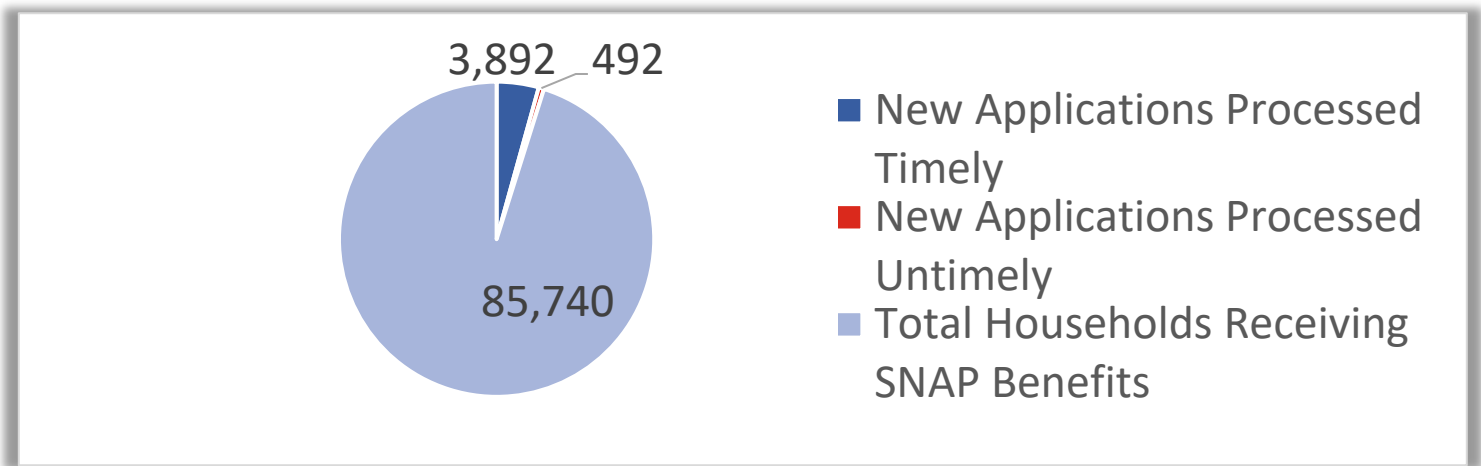
<sup>1</sup> January 2023 (4,274) to February 2024 (1,260) pending applications awaiting state action declined by 3,014 cases, which is a 71% reduction from 4,274.

	Not Overdue			Overdue			Total
	Client	State	Total	Client	State	Total	Grand Total
SNAP Expedited	45	340	385	12	51	63	448
SNAP Non-Expedited	614	518	1132	52	97	149	1281
CCAP	15	228	243	14	89	103	346
GPA Burial	1	28	29	0	3	3	32
SSP	0	82	82	0	3	3	85
GPA	43	118	161	6	13	19	180
*RIW	176	186	362	24	26	50	412
Undetermined Medical	30	579	609	58	574	632	1241
Medicaid-MAGI	47	20	67	29	38	67	134
Medicare Premium Payments	5	398	403	9	58	67	470
Medicaid Complex	7	129	136	10	240	250	386
LTSS	3	131	134	6	68	74	208
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>986</b>	<b>2757</b>	<b>3743</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>1260</b>	<b>1480</b>	<b>5223</b>

*\*This is an estimate of pending applications for RI Works and is subject to change.*

### SNAP TIMELINESS

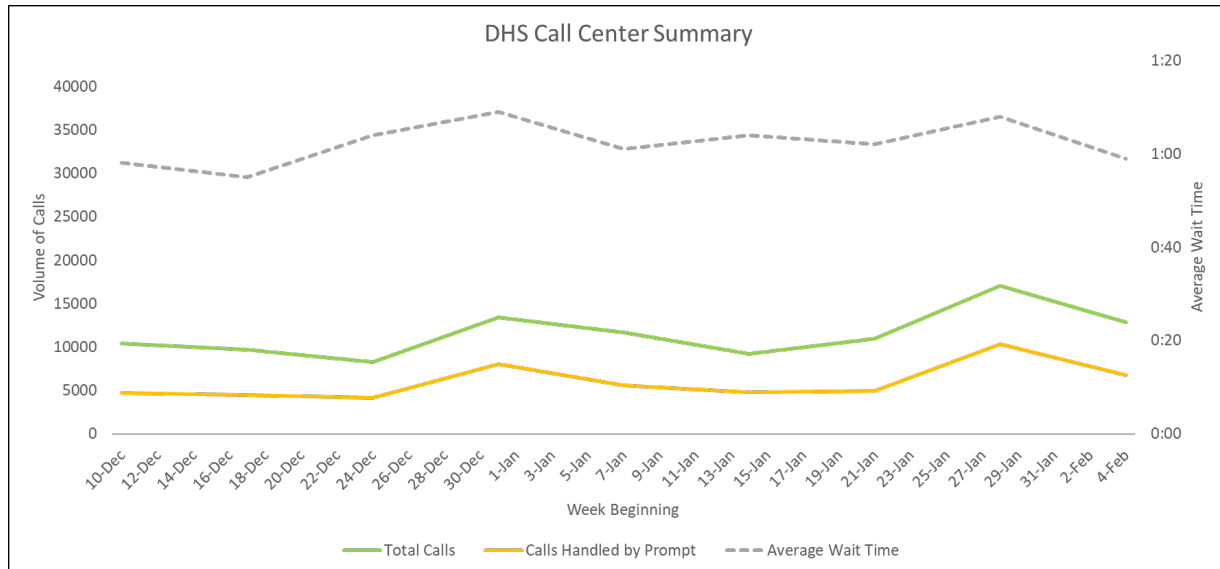
In January 2024, **85,740** households received benefits. Approximately, **89%** of new SNAP applications were processed in a timely manner. Approximately 11% of new applications were processed untimely. Importantly, cases needing to be processed that are awaiting customer or state action (such as completion of interviews or receipt of requested documents) may become overdue, leading to the untimely authorization of benefits that is not reflective of the overall customer experience.



## CALL CENTER

For the weeks starting December 31, 2023, and February 4, 2024, the average wait time to connect to DHS staff was approximately **1 hour and 4 minutes**. While DHS acknowledges this average wait time exceeds expectations, the agency has implemented several initiatives to enhance efficiencies. One such initiative is the call back functionality, strategically available in the morning, which reduces customer wait times to less than 20 minutes on average, ensuring same-day assistance. However, during high call volume days, customers may experience longer wait times if they are not able or do not opt into the call back functionality. This feature is accessible across all programs. Additionally, DHS plans to implement IVR enhancements in the summer, offering more program information, appointment rescheduling, and self-selection of program queues. Furthermore, DHS is seeking approval from federal partners to waive SNAP regulations, enabling on-demand telephone interviews for initial applications and recertifications. These strategies aim to improve workforce capabilities, streamline processes, optimize training, and leverage technological innovations to achieve goals of enhanced customer service, decreased abandonment rates, increased one-touch processing, and a 30-minute or less wait time across all queues, aligning with DHS's commitment to excellence in service delivery.

The busiest week at the Call Center was the week beginning January 28, 2023, with **17,016** 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.



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

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## CCAP OFF-CYCLE PAYMENTS (PENDING)

Below are the total number of batch payments made to child care providers for current reporting period through February 15, 2024.

Batch	Date Issued	# of Providers	Amount after Union/PAC removed
16	1/11/2024	549	\$2,366,189.78
16A	1/12/2024	24	\$44,335.91
16B	1/19/2024	25	\$44,520.01
17	1/25/2024	536	\$2,123,915.91
17A	1/26/2024	25	\$84,857.54
17B	2/2/2024	31	\$108,261.07

	Providers	Payments
Total Batch (16, 16A, 16B)	598	\$2,455,045.70
Off-cycle (16A and 16B)	49	\$88,855.92
Provider off-cycle/total	8.93%	-
Payments off-cycle/total	3.76%	-

	Providers	Payments
Total Batch (17, 17A, & 17B)	592	\$2,317,034.52
Off-cycle (17A & 17B)	56	\$193,118.61
Provider off-cycle/total	10.45%	-
Payments off-cycle/total	9.09%	-

## 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 February, DHS is processing a total of **19,322 case renewals** (42,678 individuals), with approximately **7,300 case renewals requiring action from the customer**. Children represent approximately 16% (6,700) of all individual renewals for February. More information is available in the data dashboard on [staycovered.ri.gov](https://staycovered.ri.gov).

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 started in January 2024. Households with children began receiving renewal notices December 1 as shared during a joint [press conference](#) at Progreso Latino. Redeterminations for these households will occur between January and April 2024.

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](https://staycovered.ri.gov) website with notices, marketing collateral, and other resources to help support the Medicaid renewal process. The dashboard, last updated January 25, includes key information on Medicaid enrollment and renewals, as well as updates to 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. This surge support contract is scheduled to terminate at the end of April 2024. DHS is actively engaged in surge support ramp down planning, ensuring the DHS workforce can sustain Medicaid renewal processing within the return to normal federal requirements.

### 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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