



**Rhode Island Department of Human Services**

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January 18, 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 December 16, 2023 – January 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



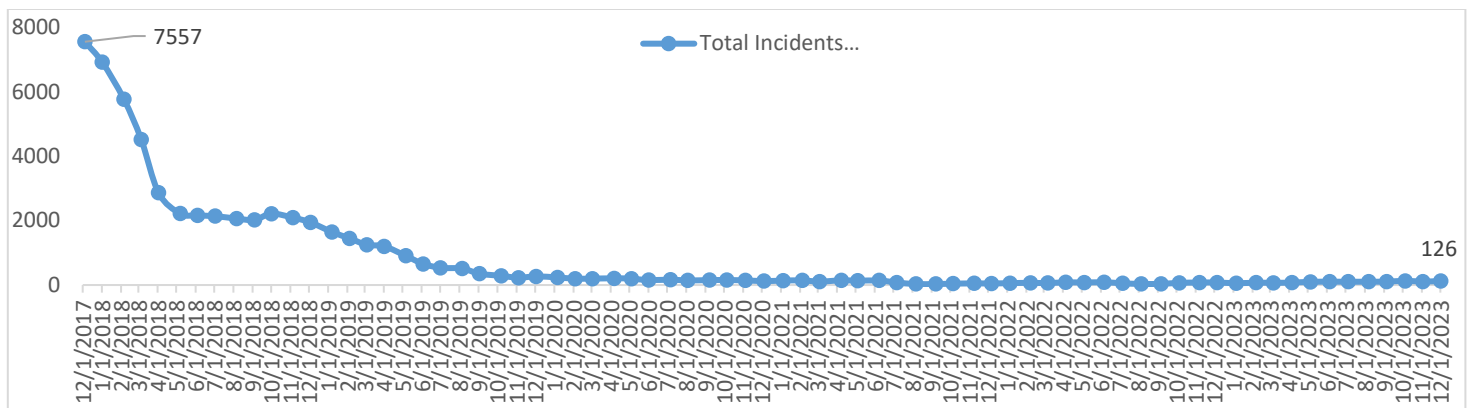
# RI Bridges: Monthly Update

## January 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 January 1, 2024, there were 162 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 – exceeding total hires in 2022 (196 positions). For the reporting period in this report, DHS hired 25 employees who have started in their new roles. These include:

- 8 Eligibility Technician I
- 1 Senior Casework Supervisor
- 2 Employment and Career Advisor
- 1 Senior Quality Control Review Supervisor
- 1 Senior Human Services Business Officer
- 3 Customer Service Aide
- 3 Eligibility Technician II (lobby)
- 3 Social Caseworker
- 1 Eligibility Technician III
- 1 Supervising Eligibility Technician
- 1 Principal Human Services Policy and Systems Specialist

DHS TRAINING  
Training Overview

Training Topic	Training Date	# Of Training Hours	# Of New Staff	# Of Current Staff
Ex Parte Learning Series (Two – full day sessions)	12/18/23 thru 12/19/23	10	0	18
Medicaid Office Hours (Two – one-hour session)	12/19/2023 1/10/2024	2	6	24
Child Care Assistance Program Office Hours (One – one-hour session)	12/19/2023	1	0	12
Long Term Services and Supports Office Hours (One – one-hour session)	12/20/2023	1	0	25
Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program Office Hours (One – one-hour session)	1/3/2024	1	0	8
New Hire Orientation (Two-full day sessions)	1/4/24 thru 1/4/24	10	6	0
BENDEX Interface Walkthrough (One – one-hour session)	1/5/2024	1	14	7
Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI) Learning Series (Four – full day sessions)	1/8/24 thru 1/12/2024	20	6	4
Immigration Training (One – three-hour session)	1/9/2024	3	9	6
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>41*</b>	<b>104*</b>

**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
Rhode Island Learning Center Trainings (These trainings are self-directed)  * This number is duplicated. Our participants are enrolled in various trainings.	FTI-2023	1,041	555
	HIPAA, and Confidentiality-2023	1,041	570
	Asset Verification System	149	121
	Claims Collection Recovery Unit	291	147
	Customer Portal	358	259
	Community Medicaid: Supplemental AVS Video	127	69
	Domestic Violence 101	351	219
	Medical Renewal Refresher	277	185
	OCSS: Child Support Refresher Process	313	188
	Sept. 22 Knowledge Transfer 7.40	471	226
	Sept. 22 Knowledge Transfer 7.41	460	222
	Nov. 22 Knowledge Transfer	391	185
	Dec. 22 Knowledge Transfer	387	204
	March 2023 Knowledge Transfer	389	208
	April 2023 Knowledge Transfer	402	202
June 2023 Knowledge Transfer	407	153	

	July 2023 Knowledge Transfer	398	137
	August 2023 Knowledge Transfer	398	136
	Sept. 2023 Knowledge Transfer	395	248
	Oct. 2023 Knowledge Transfer	357	194
	Dec. 2023 Knowledge Transfer	355	80
	RIW Miniseries	205	145
	RIBridges: Case Maintenance	395	248
	RIBridges: Case Notes Refresher	373	235
	RIBridges: Scheduling Refresher	432	261
	RIBridges: Visit Record	491	274
	SNAP: Reinvestment Updates	354	174
	SNAP: Eligibility Determination	270	194
	SNAP: ABAWD	357	213
	SNAP: ABAWD Refresher	331	231
	SNAP: ESAP	391	256
	VCC: EAD Telephonic Signature	259	39
	VCC: LTSS Telephonic Signature	59	23
	VCC: Telephonic Signature	319	147
	VCC: Call Back Functionality	131	73
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>13,125*</b>	<b>7,021*</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 (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).

**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.

**Beneficiary Earnings and Data Exchange (BENDEX) Interface Walkthrough:** This session is designed for staff members, new and experienced, looking to build their understanding and capacity on the BENDEX Interface, an interstate data exchange to access and verify Social Security numbers.

**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.

**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.

**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.

## PENDING NEW APPLICATIONS

The state continues to prioritize access to benefits. As of January 10, 2024, the total number of pending new applications across all programs was 5,152. The total overdue, pending applications awaiting state action has remained stable from December 2023, reflecting an approximate 4% change. 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.

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 (1,161 cases) and prioritizing recommendations for closure, purging and merging of duplicate cases. 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.

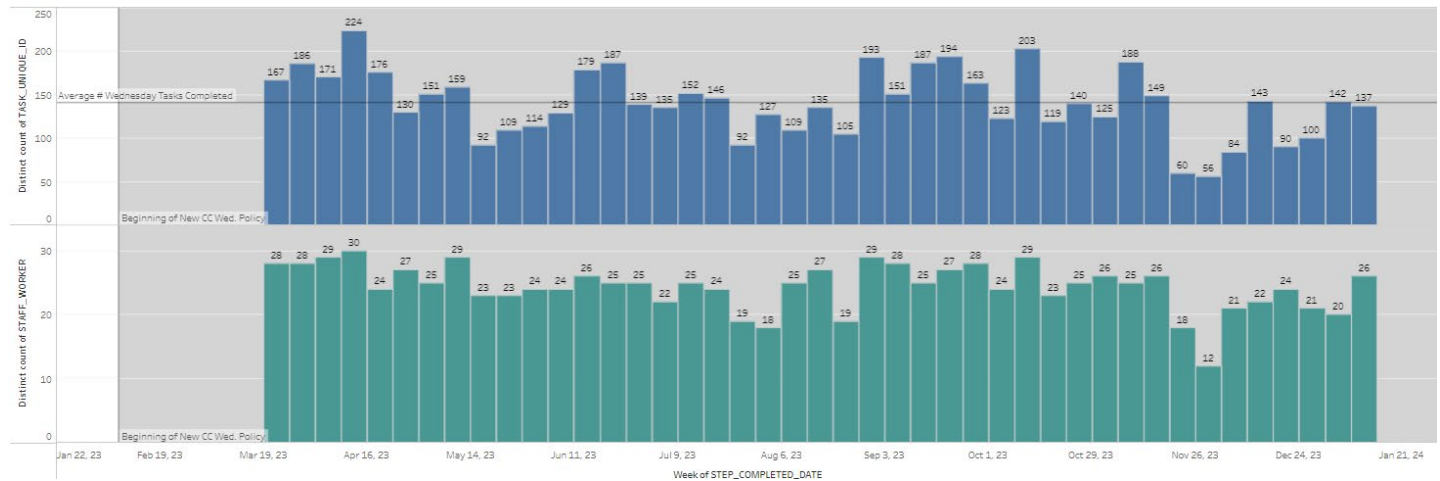
On February 8, 2023, DHS launched a pilot called Processing Wednesdays intended to prioritize call center staff to process applications, update customer files, complete reports and other operational tasks, which supports efforts to reduce the backlog. All regional offices remain open with regular services 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, who may take additional time off around the holidays like all other state offices. Importantly, DHS's operational adjustments and initiatives, such as Processing Wednesdays, have contributed to an approximate 58% 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 January 2024 (1,776) pending applications awaiting state action declined by 2,498 cases, which is a 58% reduction from 4,274.

## TASKS COMPLETED ON WEDNESDAYS



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.

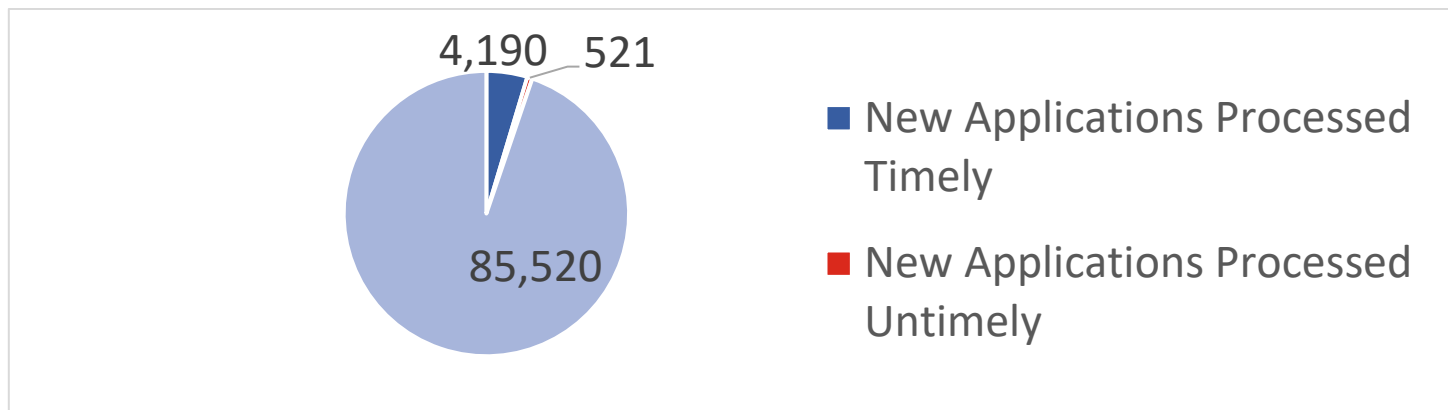
	Not Overdue			Overdue			Total
	Client	State	Total	Client	State	Total	Grand Total
<b>SNAP Expedited</b>	51	350	401	3	29	32	<b>433</b>
<b>SNAP Non-Expedited</b>	440	379	819	37	68	105	<b>924</b>
<b>CCAP</b>	7	190	197	11	76	87	<b>284</b>
<b>GPA Burial</b>	0	22	22	0	2	2	<b>24</b>
<b>SSP</b>	0	67	67	0	2	2	<b>69</b>
<b>GPA</b>	26	104	130	0	0	0	<b>130</b>
<b>*RIW</b>	123	151	274	105	47	152	<b>426</b>
<b>Undetermined Medical</b>	28	464	492	63	1,161	1,224	<b>1,716</b>
<b>Medicaid-MAGI</b>	30	39	69	21	53	74	<b>143</b>
<b>Medicare Premium Payments</b>	5	315	320	9	46	55	<b>375</b>
<b>Medicaid Complex</b>	3	157	160	12	217	229	<b>389</b>
<b>LTSS</b>	5	157	162	2	75	77	<b>239</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>718</b>	<b>2,395</b>	<b>3,113</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>1,776</b>	<b>2,039</b>	<b>5,152</b>

Analysis continues on the existing overdue undetermined medical (1,161 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 January 10, 2023, of pending applications for RI Works and is subject to change.**

## SNAP TIMELINESS

In December 2023, **85,520** 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 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

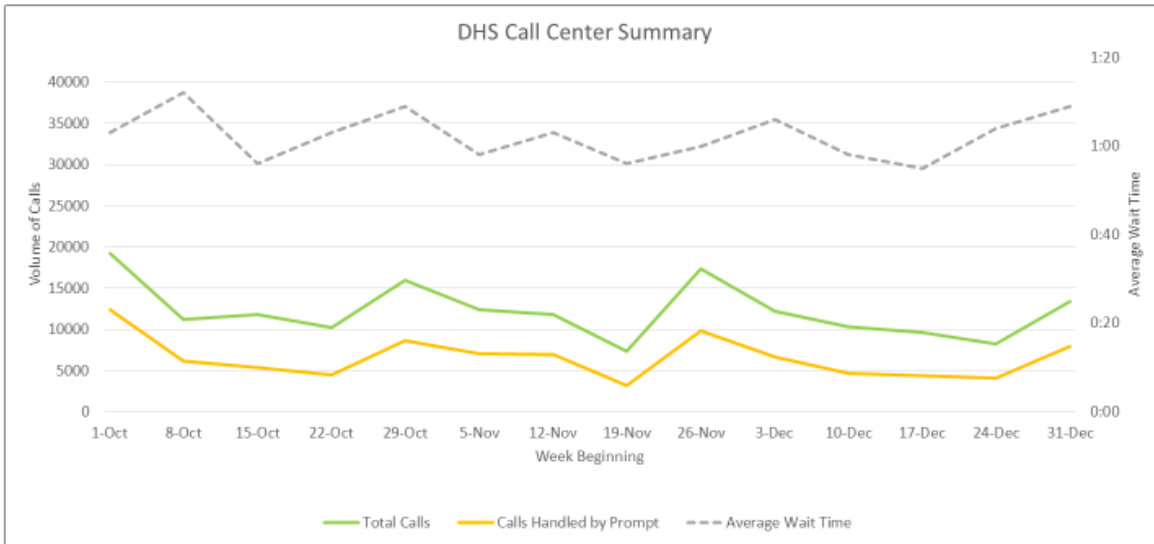
For the weeks beginning November 26, 2023, and December 31, 2023, the average wait time to connect to DHS staff was approximately **1 hour and 1 minute**. DHS recognizes this average wait time remains longer than it should be, and the agency has implemented several initiatives to improve efficiencies.

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— helping decrease wait times for MAGI callers. Additionally, 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 November 26, 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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# Call center summary 10/22/23 – 12/31/23



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 January 15, 2024.

Batch	Date Issued	# of Providers	Amount after Union/PAC removed
13	11/30/2023	523	\$2,087,973.46
13A	12/1/2023	17	\$35,804.53
14	12/14/2023	558	\$2,335,856.86
14A	12/15/2023	22	\$61,757.32
14B	12/22/2023	26	\$34,803.04
15	12/28/2023	552	\$2,320,695.33
15B	12/29/2023	27	\$80,864.62

	Providers	Payments
Total Batch (13, 13A)	540	\$2,123,777.99
Off-cycle (13A)	17	\$35,804.53
Provider off-cycle/total	3.25%	-
Payments off-cycle/total	1.71%	-

	Providers	Payments
Total Batch (14, 14A, & 14B)	606	\$2,432,417.22
Off-cycle (14A & 14B)	48	\$96,560.36
Provider off-cycle/total	8.60%	-
Payments off-cycle/total	4.13%	-



	Providers	Payments
Total Batch (15, 15B)	579	\$2,401,559.95
Off-cycle (14A & 14B)	27	\$80,864.62
Provider off-cycle/total	4.89%	-
Payments off-cycle/total	3.48%	-

## 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 January, DHS is processing a total of **19,458 case renewals**, with approximately **9,200 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 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 renewal progress for this population of Medicaid recipients will be reflected in the data dashboard on [staycovered.ri.gov](http://staycovered.ri.gov) at the end of January.

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 – last updated January 3, 2024. The dashboard 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 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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