



Rhode Island Department of Human Services

25 Howard Avenue, Building 57

Cranston, RI 02920

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

March 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 February 16, 2024 – March 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



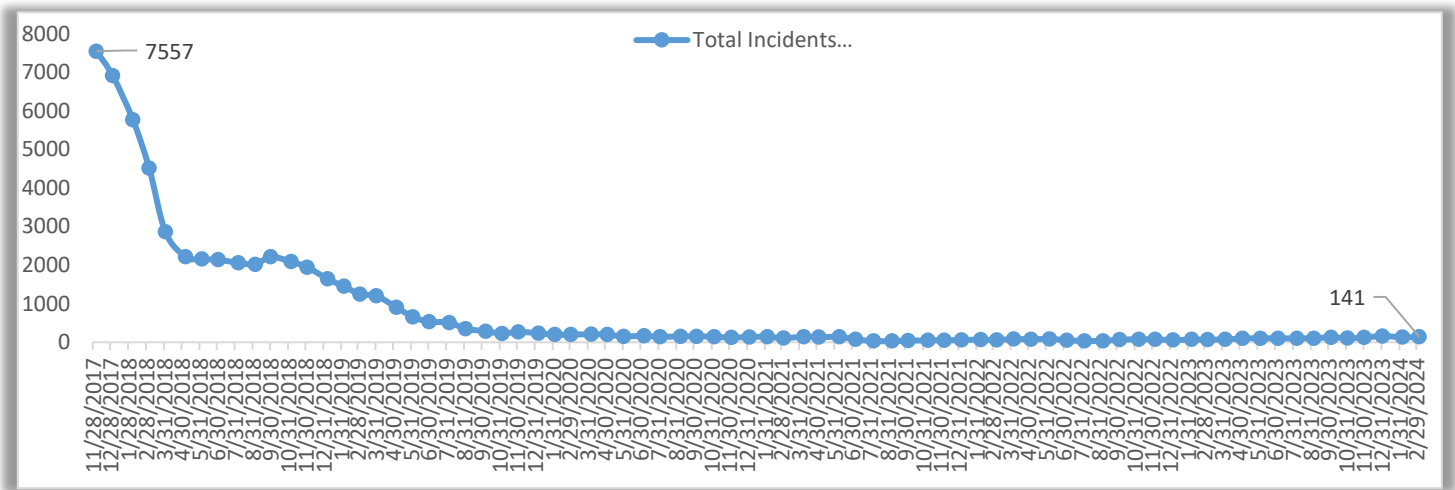
RI Bridges: Monthly Update

March 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 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 March 5, 2024, there were 141 open incidents. Current open incidents represent minor technical bugs discovered within RIBridges, 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 36 positions. Since the last report in February, DHS has hired 11 employees who have started in their new roles. These include:

- 1 Customer Support Specialist
- 1 Senior Casework Supervisor
- 2 Social Caseworker
- 1 Chief Human Services Business Officer
- 3 Eligibility Technician
- 1 Customer Service Aide
- 1 Casework Supervisor
- 1 Senior Human Services Business Officer

DHS TRAINING
Training Overview

Training Topic	Training Date	# Of Training Hours	# Of New Staff	# Of Current Staff
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (Seven full-day Sessions)	2-16-24 thru 2-27-24	35	5	8
Community Medicaid Learning Series: Session Four (One full-day session)	2-20-2024	5	1	13
Rhode Island Works (RIW) Office Hours (One one-hour session)	2-21-2024	1	0	16
Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) Eligibility Technician Learning Series (Five full-day sessions)	2-22-24 thru 2-29-24	25	0	15
Bendex Interface Walkthrough (One one-hour session)	2-23-24	1	2	4
40 Quarters Interface Walkthrough (One two-hour session)	2-26-2024	2	1	13
Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) Office Hours (One one-hour session)	2-28-24	1	0	10
New Hire Orientation (Two full-day sessions)	3-4-24 thru 3-5-24	10	5	0
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Office Hours (One one-hour session)	3-6-24	1	6	14
Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) Social Case Worker Learning Series (Four full-day sessions)	3-7-24 thru 3-12-24	20	0	10
Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI) Learning Series (Four full-day sessions)	3-11-24 thru 3-15-24	20	5	15
Medicaid Office Hours (One one-hour session)	3-13-24	1	4	19
Preparing for Interviews (One one-hour learning session)	3-15-24	1	0	13
	Totals	123	29*	150*

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.	Active Shooter, Run, Hide and Fight	1079	293
	Civil Rights Annual Training	1079	459
	FTI-2023	1071	594
	HIPAA, and Confidentiality-2023	1071	601
	Asset Verification System	147	120
	Claims Collection Recovery Unit	290	191
	Community Medicaid: Supplemental AVS Video	126	77
	Domestic Violence 101	352	229

	OCSS: Child Support Refresher Process	310	203
	Dec. 2023 Knowledge Transfer	364	248
	Jan. 2024 Knowledge Transfer	342	227
	Feb. 2024 Knowledge Transfer	339	208
	RIBridges: Case Maintenance	400	266
	RIBridges: Case Notes Refresher	374	245
	RIBridges: Scheduling Refresher	436	278
	RIBridges: Visit Record	494	288
	SNAP: Eligibility Determination	267	191
	SNAP: ABAWD	353	222
	SNAP: ABAWD Refresher	328	244
	SNAP: ESAP	395	273
	VCC: EAD Telephonic Signature	256	38
	VCC: Knowledge Transfer	275	176
	VCC: LTSS Telephonic Signature	68	27
	VCC: Telephonic Signature	316	157
	VCC: Call Back Functionality	128	24
	Totals	10,660*	5,879*
Inactive/retired courses * This number is duplicated. Our participants are enrolled in various trainings.	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
	Customer Portal (inactive for updates)	358	259
	Medical Renewal Refresher (inactive for updates)	277	185
	RIW Miniseries (inactive for updates)	205	145
	SNAP: Reinvestment Updates (archived)	348	171
	Totals	5,286*	2,681*

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.

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.

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.

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.

Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) ET Learning Series: The LTSS ET Learning Series provides participants with an introduction and overview of the LTSS program and RIBridges as it relates to LTSS. Participants must attend all sessions in this five-day training series to get the full training scope of the knowledge and skills offered. This training is designed for Eligibility Technicians and supervisors who process LTSS applications.

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.

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.

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.

Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI) Learning Series: The MAGI learning series provides participants with an introduction to MAGI policy within the RIBridges system. This a four session training series, where participants must attend all sessions to get the full training scope of the knowledge and skills offered. This training is offered in-person via six-hour sessions and targeted towards Eligibility Technicians and employees who have not attended MAGI training since the RIBridges roll-out in 2016.

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

Preparing for Interviews: This training session provides DHS staff with critical interviewing skills needed to proceed in the interview process. This session covers the tools and techniques staff can use to highlight their skillset, experience, and knowledge, thereby increasing their chances for promotional opportunities within the agency.

PENDING NEW APPLICATIONS

The state continues to prioritize access to benefits. As of March 13, 2024, the total number of pending new applications across all programs was 5,286, reflecting an approximate 1.2% change from February in total pending applications. The total overdue, pending applications awaiting state action remained relatively stable at a 6% change, from 1,260 to 1,340. While pending caseload figures are closer to normal levels and are 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.

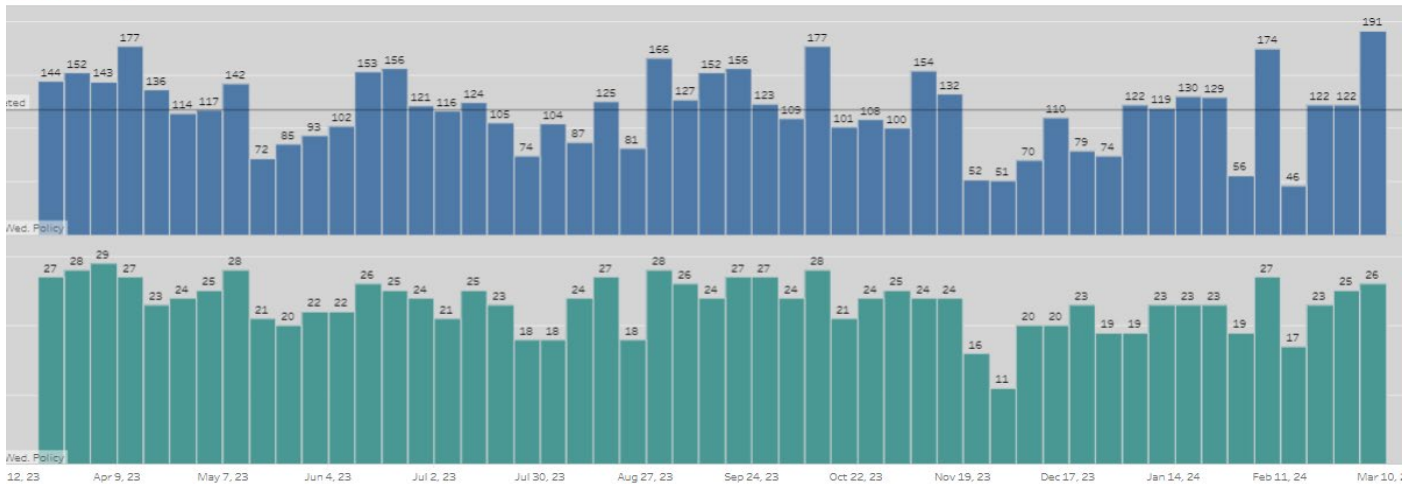
DHS also continues to see progress in the way that erroneous, aged and duplicate applications are excluded from the overall pending Undetermined Medical backlog. Our IT vendor and state team are continuing analysis on the existing overdue undetermined medical, comprised of 606 cases and reflecting an approximate 77% decrease from the same time last year (2,620). 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.

As previously shared, call center staff continue to prioritize processing applications, updating customer files, completing reports and other operational tasks on Processing Wednesdays. This phase of the initiative, formally launched in February 2023, have supported efforts to reduce the backlog. Importantly, since the launch of the initiative, only incoming calls were deferred to the IVR system on Wednesdays, with all regional offices remaining open for regular in-person services available according to their posted schedule.

With regards to the work by call center staff on Processing Wednesdays, 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.

TASKS COMPLETED ON WEDNESDAYS

(Lower Chart)



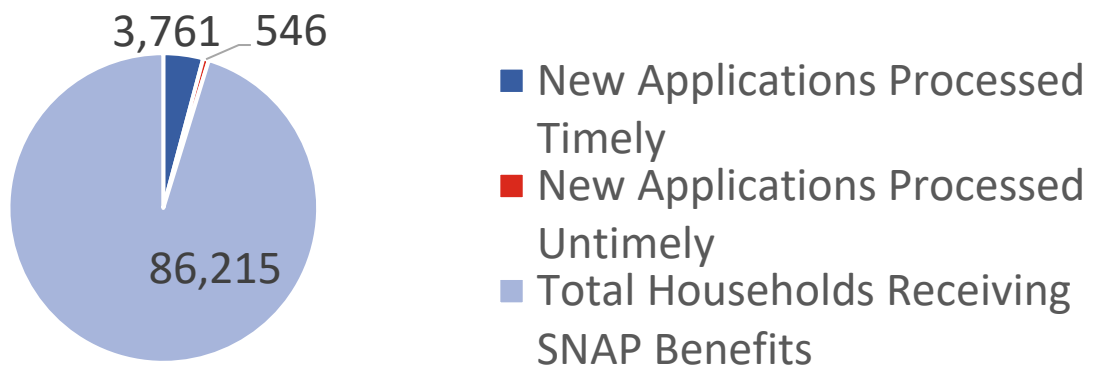
The top bar graph represents tasks completed on a Wednesday. The bar graph at the bottom represents the number of available Call Center staff for the specified Processing Wednesday.

	Not Overdue			Overdue			Total
	Client	State	Total	Client	State	Total	Grand Total
SNAP Expedited	44	297	341	7	18	25	366
SNAP Non-Expedited	476	624	1100	55	70	125	1225
CCAP	11	237	248	11	56	67	315
GPA Burial	0	22	22	0	0	0	22
SSP	0	29	29	0	0	0	29
GPA	37	87	124	1	2	3	127
*RIW	152	165	317	29	23	52	369
Undetermined Medical	45	626	671	73	606	679	1350
Medicaid-MAGI	39	19	58	35	37	72	130
Medicare Premium Payments	5	434	439	12	75	87	526
Medicaid Complex	4	114	118	12	396	408	526
LTSS	14	227	241	3	57	60	301
Grand Total	827	2881	3708	238	1340	1578	5286

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

SNAP TIMELINESS

In February 2024, **86,215** households received benefits. Approximately, **87%** of new SNAP applications (3,761) were processed in a timely manner. Approximately 13% (546) 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.

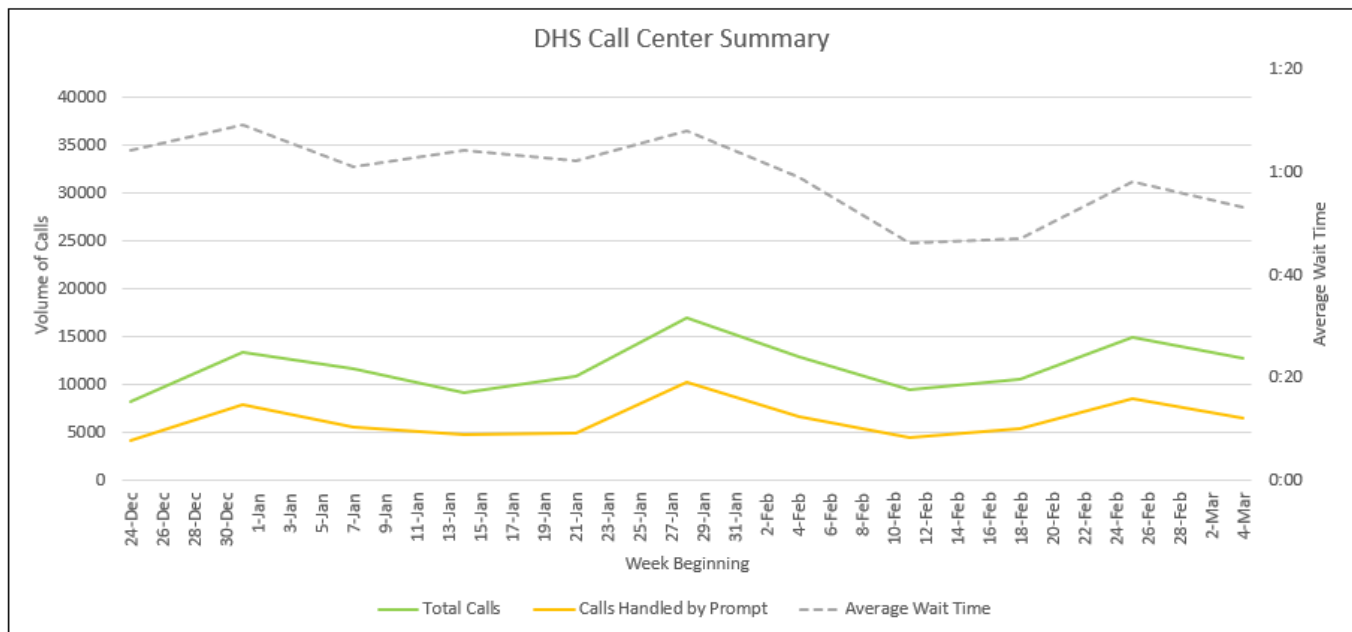


CALL CENTER

For the weeks between December 24, 2023, and March 10, 2024, the average wait time to connect to DHS staff was approximately **54 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 remains the week beginning January 28, 2024, 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.

Call center summary 12/24/23 – 3/10/24



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

-see next page-

CCAP OFF-CYCLE PAYMENTS (PENDING)

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

Batch	Date Issued	# of Providers	Amount after Union/PAC removed
18	2/8/2024	547	\$2,237,483.60
18A	2/9/2024	32	\$124,254.30
18B	2/16/2024	22	\$95,233.61
19	2/22/2024	554	\$2,333,498.44
19A	2/23/2024	22	\$59,311.75
19B	3/1/2024	25	\$27,697.06

	Providers	Payments
Total Batch (18, 18A, 18B)	601	\$2,456,971.51
Off-cycle (18A and 18B)	54	\$219,487.91
Provider off-cycle/total	9.87%	-
Payments off-cycle/total	9.81%	-

	Providers	Payments
Total Batch (19, 19A, & 19B)	601	\$2,420,507.25
Off-cycle (19A & 19B)	47	\$87,008.81
Provider off-cycle/total	8.48%	-
Payments off-cycle/total	3.73%	-

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 March, DHS is processing a total of **20,529 case renewals** (46,141 individuals), with approximately **7,000 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 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 to help support the Medicaid renewal process. The dashboard, last updated February 16, 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.

-end-