



Report to the Chairman,
Subcommittee on Human Resources,
Committee on Ways and Means,
House of Representatives

September 2018

REEMPLOYMENT SERVICES

DOL Could Better
Support States
in Targeting
Unemployment
Insurance Claimants
for Services

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-633](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Human Resources, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2017, the UI program provided about \$30 billion in temporary income support to 5.7 million claimants who became unemployed through no fault of their own. The federal government provides various resources states can use to help UI claimants achieve reemployment. GAO was asked to review how states identify and serve claimants who need such assistance.

This report examines, among other things, (1) what key federal programs and approaches states used to help UI claimants return to work, and (2) how states used profiling systems to identify claimants who are most likely to exhaust their benefits and need assistance returning to work. GAO reviewed relevant federal laws and guidance; analyzed the most recent available national data on UI claimant participation in key workforce programs, from July 2015 through June 2016; interviewed officials from DOL, six states with key reemployment practices, and three additional states with a variety of profiling practices; and reviewed national studies examining state profiling systems.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOL (1) systematically collect sufficient information to identify states at risk of poor profiling system performance, (2) develop a process for providing risk-based technical assistance to such states, and (3) update guidance to clarify state profiling options. DOL agreed with these recommendations.

View [GAO-18-633](#). For more information, contact Cindy Brown Barnes at (202) 512-7215 or brownbarnesc@gao.gov.

September 2018

REEMPLOYMENT SERVICES

DOL Could Better Support States in Targeting Unemployment Insurance Claimants for Services

What GAO Found

Nationwide, four key federally funded workforce programs helped states provide reemployment services, such as career counseling and job search assistance, to millions of unemployment insurance (UI) claimants, according to data from July 2015 through June 2016, the most recent period available (see table). The six selected states GAO reviewed in-depth reported using these key programs to support their efforts to help claimants return to work. Selected state officials described skills assessments, job search assistance, and interview and resume workshops as the types of services they use to connect UI claimants to jobs quickly. Officials also described varying service delivery approaches, with some of the selected states emphasizing the use of online services, while others relied to a greater extent on in-person services.

Key Federally Funded Workforce Programs Helping States Provide Reemployment Services to Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claimants, July 2015 through June 2016

Program	Services provided	UI claimants served
Wagner-Peyser Employment Service	Non-training services, including career counseling, job listings, job search assistance, and referrals to employers	5 million participated
Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA)	Services including assessment of claimant's continued eligibility for UI and development of individual reemployment plan	1.1 million scheduled to receive services
WIOA ^a Dislocated Worker	Training, such as occupational skills training, and services, including career counseling and job search assistance	311,000 finished participating
WIOA ^a Adult		299,000 finished participating

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Labor (DOL) data. | GAO-18-633.

^aWorkforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

According to a 2014 national questionnaire to states, most states used a statistical system to identify UI claimants who are most likely to exhaust their benefits and need assistance returning to work (known as profiling). Six of the nine states GAO reviewed used statistical systems and three used non-statistical approaches. GAO identified several concerns with the Department of Labor's (DOL) oversight and support of state UI profiling systems:

- Although a 2007 DOL-commissioned study found that some statistical systems may not perform well, DOL has not collected the information needed to identify states at risk of poor profiling system performance.
- Some selected states have faced technical challenges in implementing and updating their statistical systems. However, DOL does not have a process for identifying and providing technical assistance to states at risk of poor system performance or those facing technical challenges. Instead, it only provides assistance to those states that request it.
- While states have latitude to choose their preferred profiling approach, DOL's 1994 guidance encourages all states to use statistical systems. Because DOL has not updated this guidance to ensure that it clearly communicates all available profiling system options, some states may not be aware that they have greater flexibility in choosing an option that best suits their needs.

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Abbreviations

DOL	Department of Labor
EUC	Emergency Unemployment Compensation
REA	Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment
RESEA	Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment
UCX	Unemployment Compensation for Ex-Servicemembers
UI	Unemployment Insurance
WIA	Workforce Investment Act of 1998
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
WPRS	Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services

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September 4, 2018

The Honorable Adrian Smith
Chairman, Subcommittee on Human Resources
Committee on Ways and Means
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The federal-state unemployment insurance (UI) program provides temporary income support to eligible workers who lose their jobs through no fault of their own. Overseen by the Department of Labor (DOL) and administered by states, the UI program paid approximately \$30 billion in benefits to 5.7 million claimants in 2017. To receive benefits, UI claimants generally must be able to work, be available to work, and seek work actively. Claimants may access reemployment services from the public workforce system—a network of federal, state, and local partners that administer and carry out an array of federal employment and training programs—to help them return to work. These reemployment services, such as job search assistance and career counseling, are available at one-stop centers, also known as American Job Centers. However, technology has changed how UI claimants interact with the public workforce system. Many claimants now apply for UI benefits remotely, and may not visit one-stop centers to obtain reemployment services.

Policymakers have encouraged states to strengthen the connection between the UI program and the public workforce system in a number of ways. For instance, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires local workforce development boards to include in their plans strategies for strengthening linkages between the UI program and one-stop centers.¹ In 2018, Congress also authorized up to approximately \$3.9 billion in funding over the next 10 years for the Reemployment

¹Enacted in 2014, WIOA repealed the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA). Similar to the previous law, WIOA designates the UI program as a mandatory partner in one-stop centers. WIOA emphasizes the alignment and integration of workforce programs that provide education and training services to help job seekers obtain employment and advance in the labor market. Pub. L. No. 113-128, 128 Stat. 1425 (2014).

Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) grant program.²

Participating states use a profiling system to identify UI claimants who are most likely to exhaust their benefits, meaning that they receive benefits for the maximum time period for which the state pays benefits.³ The state then selects these claimants, as well as certain military veterans, to receive services offered through the program. These services include a one-stop center orientation and meeting with a caseworker, who assesses each claimant's eligibility for UI benefits and helps the claimant develop an individualized reemployment plan, among other things.

You asked us to review how states leverage resources from the public workforce system to meet UI claimants' reemployment needs. This report (1) describes some key approaches selected states use to support UI claimants who need assistance returning to work, (2) describes what is known about how often UI claimants receive services through key federally funded workforce programs and how states fund reemployment services for UI claimants, and (3) examines what is known about how states use profiling systems to identify UI claimants who are most likely to exhaust their benefits and need assistance returning to work, and how DOL supports and monitors these efforts.

First, to identify some key approaches states use to support UI claimants who need assistance returning to work, we reviewed relevant reports and program evaluations, and interviewed officials from DOL, DOL's Office of Inspector General, and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA). Using information from these sources, we selected six states cited in research or by stakeholders as having at least one noteworthy reemployment practice, such as an effective or well-designed reemployment program or commitment to using technology to improve service delivery, as well as other features of interest, such as use of state

²RESEA was created in fiscal year 2015, and states were awarded \$81 million in discretionary grant funds under the program that year. By fiscal year 2017, available state grant awards had grown to \$115 million. In 2018, legislation was enacted that made RESEA a formula grant program with incentive payments to states that exceed target outcomes. The legislation authorized funding for the program through 2027, and authorized a base appropriation of \$117 million for each year plus an annual threshold (cap) under which additional funds may be appropriated. Total budget authority (base appropriation plus cap) increases each year to a maximum of \$750 million in 2027, for a total of up to approximately \$3.9 billion in budget authority. Pub. L. No. 115-123, § 30206.

³In the federal-state UI program, states have considerable flexibility to set benefit amounts and their duration (the maximum period of time that the state pays benefits), and establish eligibility requirements.

funds to help provide reemployment services. We visited four states (Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, and Utah), where we interviewed state and local workforce officials, and had phone interviews with state workforce agency officials in two states (Texas and Wisconsin). Our selected states provided illustrative examples of the approaches they take to meet the reemployment needs of UI claimants; these examples are not representative of state practices nationwide.

Second, to describe how often UI claimants receive services through key federally funded workforce programs, we interviewed DOL officials to identify which programs states typically use to serve UI claimants, and analyzed national data on UI claimant participation in those programs—the DOL-administered Wagner-Peyser Employment Service, RESEA, the WIOA Adult program, and the WIOA Dislocated Worker program—for program year 2015 (July 2015 through June 2016), the most recent year available at the time of our review.⁴ We assessed the reliability of these data by reviewing data system documentation, conducting data checks, and interviewing knowledgeable DOL and selected state officials. We found the data sufficiently reliable to describe how many UI claimants states report serving through key federally funded workforce programs, and have included caveats regarding differences in state reporting practices and other limitations, as appropriate.⁵ To describe how states fund reemployment services for UI claimants, we analyzed summary reemployment program expenditure data provided by five of the six selected states for state fiscal year 2017, the most recent year available at the time of our review.⁶ We assessed the reliability of these data by interviewing knowledgeable state officials, and found them reliable for our purposes.

⁴States were transitioning to a new DOL reporting system and new WIOA performance measures at the time of our review, and data covering program year 2016 (July 2016 through June 2017) were not yet available. Further, while WIA performance measures were still in effect in program year 2015, we use the terms “WIOA Adult” and “WIOA Dislocated Worker” programs to reflect the fact that WIOA repealed the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) as of July 1, 2015.

⁵For instance, for the time period under review, states had flexibility in how they defined Wagner-Peyser Employment Service participation, limiting the comparability of participant counts across states. As a result, in this report we have described reasons for discrepancies in selected state Wagner-Peyser Employment Service participation data, as appropriate.

⁶Officials from the sixth state, Texas, told us they did not track these expenditures in the period under review.

Third, to obtain national information on how states use profiling systems to identify UI claimants who are most likely to exhaust their benefits and need assistance returning to work, we reviewed a 2007 national study of state profiling systems and analyzed state responses to a 2014 follow-up profiling system questionnaire.⁷ To obtain more in-depth information on the practices of individual states, we interviewed officials from our six selected states and three additional states (Connecticut, Kentucky, and Maryland), selected because they worked with external partners to develop their profiling systems or had systems DOL officials identified as innovative. Where available, we also reviewed documentation related to selected states' profiling systems. To obtain information about how DOL supports and monitors states' use of profiling systems, we interviewed DOL officials and reviewed DOL guidance and technical assistance materials. Lastly, we reviewed relevant federal laws and DOL guidance, and assessed DOL's efforts against standards for internal control in the federal government.⁸

We conducted this performance audit from December 2016 to September 2018 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Enacted in July 2014, WIOA emphasizes the alignment and integration of workforce programs, primarily administered by the departments of Labor and Education, that provide education and training services to help job seekers obtain employment and advance in the labor market. WIOA also provides for state workforce development boards to help oversee a system of local workforce development boards that, in turn, deliver

⁷Specifically, we reviewed W. F. Sullivan, L. Coffey, L. Kolovich, et al., *Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services Evaluation of State Worker Profiling Models Final Report*, a report commissioned by the U.S. Department of Labor (Bethesda, MD: Coffey Communications, LLC, March 2007). We also analyzed state responses to a 2014 questionnaire administered by the authors of "Doing More with Less: Leveraging Advances in Data Science to Support an Intelligent Workforce System" in *Transforming U.S. Workforce Development Policies for the 21st Century*, ed. C. Van Horn, T. Edwards, and T. Greene (Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2015).

⁸GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).

services through a network of one-stop centers. In its guidance on implementing WIOA, DOL states that this network is a shared responsibility of states, local boards, and other partners, including one-stop programs. It also encourages integration of services across one-stop programs to promote seamless service delivery.

The public workforce system is available to all job seekers, including UI claimants, and through it claimants may access reemployment services from a variety of federally funded workforce programs.⁹ At one-stop centers, states make services such as job search assistance and career counseling available to UI claimants and other job seekers using programs including the DOL-administered Wagner-Peyser Employment Service, the WIOA Adult program, and the WIOA Dislocated Worker program. The WIOA Adult program and WIOA Dislocated Worker program may also be used to provide training (see table 1).

Table 1: Select Federally Funded Workforce Programs That States Can Use to Provide Reemployment Services to Job Seekers, Including Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claimants

Program	Population Served	Services Provided
Wagner-Peyser Employment Service	All job seekers	Non-training services, including career counseling, job listings, job search assistance, and referrals to employers
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult	All individuals ages 18 or older, with priority for receipt of certain services given to low-income adults, recipients of public assistance, and adults who are deficient in basic skills ^a	Training, such as occupational skills training, and services, including career counseling and job search assistance
WIOA Dislocated Worker	Unemployed individuals who are eligible for or have exhausted their UI benefits, among others ^b	

Source: GAO analysis of relevant federal law and information from Department of Labor officials. | GAO-18-633

^aWith respect to adults, WIOA defines basic skills deficient as those who are unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English, at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual's family, or in society.

^bOther individuals served include those who demonstrate labor force attachment, but have insufficient earnings to qualify for UI or performed services not covered under state UI law; formerly self-employed workers who are unemployed due to general economic conditions; displaced homemakers; and spouses of armed service members who meet certain criteria.

⁹In this report, we refer to services provided to facilitate a UI claimant's return to work as reemployment services.

UI claimants may also access services from other programs offered through the public workforce system. One such program, RESEA, is designated for the provision of reemployment services to UI claimants specifically. Established as a discretionary grant program in 2015, RESEA makes funding available to states for reemployment services to UI claimants identified by their state as most likely to exhaust their benefits, as well as veterans who receive UI benefits through the Unemployment Compensation for Ex-Servicemembers (UCX) program.¹⁰ During fiscal year 2017, 49 states and the District of Columbia participated in RESEA, and DOL made \$115 million in grant funds available through the program.¹¹ In February 2018, legislation was enacted that established RESEA as a formula grant program with incentive payments for states meeting or exceeding outcome goals, and authorized up to approximately \$3.9 billion in funding for the program through fiscal year 2027.¹² In July 2018, DOL announced that it was developing an implementation plan for the new RESEA program provisions, and would provide details on this plan in the coming months.¹³

RESEA aims to link UI claimants to the public workforce system, address their individual reemployment needs, and help states prevent and detect improper payments by conducting UI eligibility reviews. Once a UI claimant is selected for RESEA, the claimant is required to attend a one-stop orientation and meet one-on-one with a caseworker, who conducts a

¹⁰The RESEA program replaced the earlier Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) program, through which states had discretion to develop their own methodology for targeting claimants for services, but were not permitted to serve UI claimants who had been identified as likely to exhaust their benefits and were already being served under the state's Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services (WPRS) program. When RESEA was established in 2015, states were given two years to transition to the new RESEA requirement to target UI claimants identified as most likely to exhaust their benefits. For the purposes of this report, we refer to RESEA requirements applicable to the 2017 grant cycle.

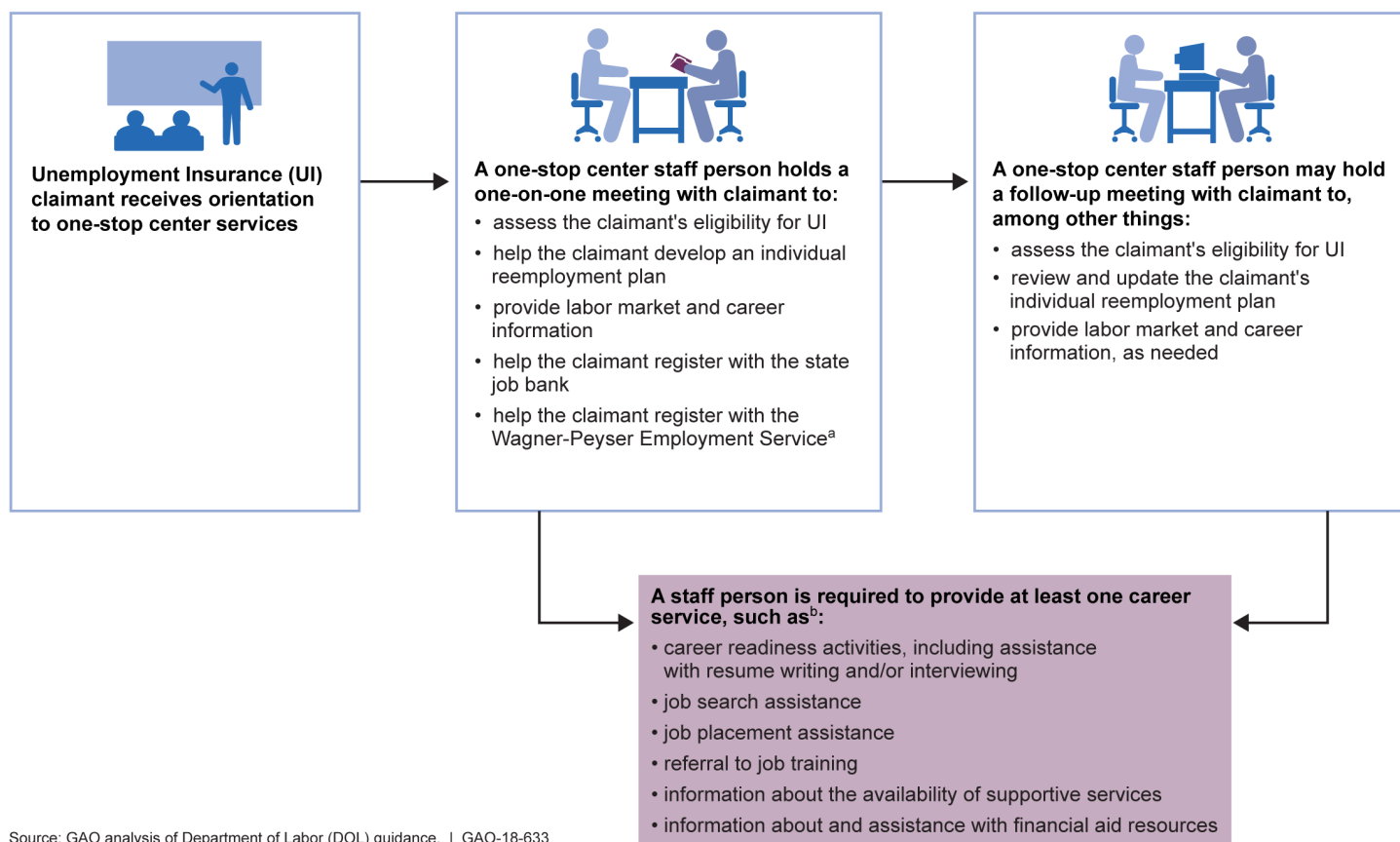
¹¹Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands also participated in RESEA in 2017. Wyoming did not participate.

¹²For fiscal years 2021 through 2026, 89 percent of funding is reserved for formula grants, 10 percent is reserved for incentive payments, and no more than 1 percent is reserved for DOL research and technical assistance. After 2026, 84 percent of funding is reserved for formula grants, 15 percent is reserved for incentive payments, and no more than 1 percent is reserved for DOL research and technical assistance. Pub. L. No. 115-123, § 30206.

¹³In this announcement, DOL also directed states with active RESEA programs to continue their programs in a manner consistent with their approved fiscal year 2017 RESEA grant applications, and revised some RESEA-required activities to grant states greater flexibility in RESEA design and service delivery.

UI eligibility assessment, helps the claimant develop an individualized reemployment plan, and provides or refers the claimant to other reemployment services, as appropriate (see fig. 1).¹⁴ In some states, claimants participate in a second caseworker meeting to receive follow-up services, either in person or by phone.

Figure 1: Example of How States May Deliver Services under Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Program



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Labor (DOL) guidance. | GAO-18-633

^aThe Wagner-Peyser Employment Service is a federally funded program through which states can provide job seekers, including UI claimants, with career counseling, job listings, job search assistance, and referrals to employers.

^bStarting in 2018, states are permitted, but no longer required, to provide career services as a part of RESEA.

¹⁴RESEA services may be delivered by UI, Wagner-Peyser Employment Service, WIOA, or other one-stop center staff.

UI Claimant Profiling Requirements

Since 1994, states have been required by law to develop and use profiling systems to identify UI claimants who are likely to exhaust their benefits, and to refer such claimants to reemployment services.¹⁵ In response to this legislation, DOL launched a Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services (WPRS) initiative in 1994. Currently, most states provide services to such claimants through their RESEA programs, using the profiling systems they developed under the WPRS initiative.¹⁶

DOL issued WPRS guidance in 1994 describing minimum profiling requirements for all states and listing two profiling options:

- **Statistical profiling systems** predict each UI claimant's likelihood of exhausting benefits based on claimant characteristics (such as education level, prior claims history, and industry or occupation) and other factors. The system produces a ranked list, and claimants with the highest predicted likelihood of exhausting benefits are selected for reemployment services.
- **Non-statistical characteristic screens** sort claimants into two groups, based on the presence of certain characteristics. Claimants with one or more of these characteristics are considered not likely to exhaust their benefits, and are excluded from selection for services. Remaining claimants are considered likely to exhaust their benefits, and a subset is randomly selected for reemployment services.¹⁷

This guidance also specifies characteristics that states must, may, and are forbidden to use in their profiling systems. Specifically, states are required to include certain characteristics to identify UI claimants who are permanently laid off and unlikely to return to their previous industry or occupation.¹⁸ States may also use a claimant's education, tenure at a

¹⁵Pub. L. No. 103-152, § 4, 107 Stat. 1516, 1517 (1993), codified at 42 U.S.C. § 503(j). Claimants who are identified as likely to exhaust their benefits and referred to services must generally participate in those services as a condition of eligibility for UI benefits.

¹⁶In states and geographic areas within states where RESEA is not in place, states are still required to serve UI claimants identified as most likely to exhaust their benefits through the WPRS initiative.

¹⁷In some cases, all remaining claimants are selected for reemployment services.

¹⁸These characteristics are a claimant's return to work date, use of a union hiring hall (used to facilitate hiring in certain industries), first unemployment benefit payment, and previous industry or occupation.

previous job, and the state unemployment rate. States are prohibited from using claimant age, race or ethnic group, sex, disability, religion, political affiliation, and citizenship, among others. DOL determined that use of these characteristics could produce discriminatory effects, as UI claimants selected for reemployment services through the profiling process are required to attend services, or may lose their eligibility to receive UI benefits.¹⁹

Research on Effectiveness of Reemployment Services

DOL-commissioned research suggests that reemployment services may help UI claimants find work more quickly and reduce UI program expenditures, though results have differed across states reviewed. A 2008 study found that the Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) program, the predecessor to RESEA, was effective in reducing the average duration of UI benefits in one of two states reviewed. Specifically, this study found that the REA program led to a statistically significant reduction in the duration of UI benefit claims of about a week for claimants with multiple caseworker meetings in Minnesota, but did not find statistically significant effects for claimants in North Dakota.²⁰ A subsequent 2011 study found significant reductions in UI benefit duration and amount of benefits received among REA participants in three of four states reviewed, with the largest effects exhibited in Nevada.²¹ A more in-depth 2012 evaluation of Nevada's REA program during the 2007 to 2009 Great Recession found that, on average, REA participants exited the UI program about three weeks sooner and used \$873 less in benefits than non-participants as a result. This impact on UI benefit duration and benefit amounts includes both reductions in regular UI benefits and in

¹⁹Department of Labor, *Unemployment Insurance Program Letter No. 41-94, Unemployment Insurance Program Requirements for the Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services System* (August 16, 1994).

²⁰According to the authors, the lack of significant results in North Dakota was not surprising given that the control group received similar, but less intensive, services as the treatment group. Benus, Jacob et al. *Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) Study, FY 2005 Initiative*. (Impaq International, LLC, March 2008).

²¹The four states studied were Florida, Idaho, Illinois, and Nevada. The effects on duration ranged from an average decrease of about one week of benefits in Idaho to about three weeks in Nevada. There were no statistically significant effects in Illinois. Poe-Yamagata, Eileen et al. *Impact of the Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) Initiative*. (Impaq International, LLC, June 2011).

Emergency Unemployment Compensation (EUC) benefits.²² Additionally, REA participants were nearly 20 percent more likely to obtain employment in the first two quarters after entering the program.²³

Selected States Provide Services to Help UI Claimants Find Work Using a Variety of Key Approaches

Selected States All Provide Reemployment Services to Connect UI Claimants to Jobs Quickly

Officials from all six of our selected states said they provide reemployment services designed to help UI claimants get back to work quickly. These services include assessing claimant skills and service needs, providing job search assistance and referrals, and conducting interviewing and resume workshops, among others.²⁴ State officials said they may also refer claimants with more extensive needs to additional services, such as longer-term case management or retraining.²⁵

In interviews, officials in the six selected states further described how they provided these types of services, which generally aligned with the

²²The recent EUC program was a temporary federal program enacted in 2008 that provided additional UI benefits to claimants during the Great Recession. The most recent extension of the program expired on January 1, 2014.

²³The positive impact on employment lasted for six quarters after claimants entered the program, but was lower after the first two quarters. Michaelides, Marios, et al. *Impact of the Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) Initiative in Nevada*. (Impaq International, LLC, January 2012).

²⁴Job referrals include services that facilitate the matching of job seekers and employers by, for example, providing the claimant with information on specific job openings or bringing qualified and available job seekers to the attention of an employer.

²⁵Officials from three selected states said that, compared to today, claimants during the Great Recession faced much longer periods of unemployment, and some needed more intensive services to help guide them to the next phase of their career. For instance, in Utah officials said that after the housing market declined, some mortgage brokers needed retraining to find work in another industry.

services states reported providing nationwide, to meet UI claimant reemployment needs in their state:²⁶

Assessments

Officials in four of the six selected states said they use assessments to help identify UI claimants' service needs and potential career paths. According to officials in these states, claimants complete assessments prior to meeting with caseworkers, and caseworkers use the results to inform service provision. For instance, in Massachusetts, officials said caseworkers use results from a needs assessment to help tailor the claimant's career action plan and make appropriate service referrals. In Nebraska, officials said claimants complete three short career assessments—a career interest inventory, a skills confidence assessment, and a work value assessment— prior to meeting with a caseworker. Officials said these assessments can help claimants identify career paths they may not have considered; one official shared an example of a claimant who launched a successful travel industry career based on her assessment results.

Job Search Assistance and Referrals

Officials in five of the six selected states described ways they help UI claimants more effectively search and apply for jobs. In particular, officials in four of these states said some claimants need help adapting to the current virtual job search environment, especially those claimants who have not searched for work in recent years. To help such claimants, caseworkers may show them how to use online platforms to conduct their search. For example, a caseworker in Nebraska said she spends substantial time during one-on-one meetings helping claimants navigate search tools and complete online applications in the state's online job bank. Additionally, caseworkers in Nebraska and Nevada mentioned providing claimants guidance on how to market themselves online, such as using key words in their resumes to pass electronic application screening.

Officials in five of the six selected states also described other ways they connect or refer UI claimants to positions that align with their skillsets. For example, these officials said they host job fairs to help claimants establish personal connections with employers in their field and encourage claimants in their job search. Texas officials said they host job fairs that are targeted specifically for veterans and their spouses, and that

²⁶During our interviews, selected state officials may not have mentioned all the services their states provide or make available to UI claimants, but provided information on services that are key to their states' strategies for helping UI claimants return to work.

caseworkers reach out to veterans to make sure they are aware of these events. In addition to these large-scale events, officials in two of the selected states said they also provide individualized job referrals. Specifically, officials in Nebraska and Nevada said one-stop center staff reach out to claimants who would be good candidates for available jobs and encourage them to apply. Officials in four of our selected states also said they had enhanced their online job banks to help claimants find appropriate positions more easily, for instance, by automatically suggesting job matches based on the skills listed in claimant resumes.²⁷ (See text box.)

State Spotlight: Enhancing Job Banks

To help veteran claimants search and apply for work, Texas' online job bank includes a crosswalk between military and civilian occupational skills and allows employers to specify veteran hiring preferences.

Source: GAO interview with state officials. | GAO-18-633

Interview and Resume Assistance

Officials in five of the six selected states described the services they offer to help UI claimants improve their resumes and interviewing skills, which officials said was generally a need among claimants. For instance, in one-on-one meetings, caseworkers may review a claimant's resume and suggest improvements or hold mock interviews with claimants to help them prepare for meetings with potential employers. These services are often offered through workshops at one-stop centers in selected states. Officials in Nevada said such resume workshops are especially helpful for veteran claimants who need help translating their military experience into terms applicable to the civilian workforce.

The types of services selected state officials mentioned in our interviews generally align with the most frequently provided services reported by states in available national data. These data indicate that in 2014 states most often referred UI claimants to reemployment services in four categories: orientations, assessments, job referrals, and job search assistance.²⁸ Specifically, we found that, nationwide, 60 percent of

²⁷State job banks are state websites where employers can post job listings and job seekers can search for and apply for jobs online.

²⁸These data are specific to UI claimants identified as most likely to exhaust their benefits and referred to services under DOL's WPRS initiative. DOL officials said that from 2015-2016, the WPRS and REA programs were combined into the RESEA program. As a result, 2014 is the last year for which comprehensive WPRS activity data were available.

claimants reporting for services were referred to orientations, 55 percent were referred to assessment services, 53 percent were referred to job referral services, and 41 percent were referred to job search assistance.²⁹

Selected States Vary in How They Deliver Services through their Primary Reemployment Programs for UI Claimants

Officials from all six of our selected states described operating reemployment programs that connect many UI claimants to the state's public workforce system; we refer to these as primary reemployment programs. While the services available through these programs are similar, state approaches to selecting participants for and delivering services through these programs vary. According to information from state officials, these selected states' primary reemployment programs generally follow the RESEA model of a one-stop center orientation and one-on-one meeting with a caseworker.³⁰

Officials in all six of our selected states said they served UI claimants identified as most likely to exhaust their benefits, as required by law, through their primary reemployment programs, but some select additional claimants for these programs as well.³¹ Officials in two states, Massachusetts and Nebraska, said they believe it is important for all claimants to have access to reemployment services and that they require all claimants to report to a one-stop center for an orientation and meeting with a caseworker.³² (See text box.)

State Spotlight: Service Goals

In 2015, Nebraska expanded its primary reemployment program, called NEres, to all unemployment insurance claimants, with state officials noting that all claimants can benefit from the high-quality services it offers.

Source: GAO interview with state officials. | GAO-18-633

²⁹States could refer claimants to multiple services.

³⁰ Most, but not all, of these programs also leverage RESEA funding.

³¹States participating in the RESEA program must serve UI claimants who are most likely to exhaust their benefits and certain ex-servicemembers, though they have flexibility to select additional UI claimants to participate in reemployment services.

³²In Massachusetts, officials said certain claimants, including those who are part of a union hiring hall, have a return to work date, or are seasonally employed, are generally exempt from participating in services. In Nebraska, officials said that claimants who have a return to work date, are in an approved training program, or receive active military orders, are generally exempt from participating in services.

In contrast, officials from three selected states said they prioritize claimants who are most likely to exhaust their benefits for reemployment services, and noted that these claimants have the greatest service needs. Officials from Wisconsin, for example, said claimants who are not selected for the state's RESEA program are considered job ready and typically do not need in-person services. In addition to prioritizing claimants who are most likely to exhaust their benefits, our sixth selected state, Nevada, randomly selects additional claimants to participate in a state-funded reemployment program that is similar to the state's RESEA program. Officials in Nevada said they believe their state-funded program allows them to serve claimants with less intensive needs more efficiently and builds upon the success of the state's prior REA program.³³

Officials in the six selected states described varying approaches to providing reemployment services online versus in person. Officials in two states said their state strongly encourages the use of online services. For example, officials in Utah said all UI claimants are required to fill out an online needs assessment when filing a claim, and based on their responses, are required to complete up to five additional online workshops. These officials said leveraging online self-service options helps UI claimants adapt to using technology in the workplace and helps the state preserve limited financial resources (see text box). Similarly, officials in Wisconsin said claimants are required to complete an online needs assessment and orientation, and claimants can access various online workshops to address identified service needs. These officials believe this emphasis on online services will help claimants become more self-sufficient and in control of their job search.

State Spotlight: Online Services

Officials in Utah described the one-stop center's motto as "self-directed." One-stop center staff encourage customers to access services independently through the state's online portal in the computer lab so that they feel empowered to use online services at home.

Source: GAO interview with state officials. | GAO-18-633

³³DOL-sponsored research found that Nevada's REA program resulted in the largest reduction in UI duration and benefits among the four states that were studied. Officials in Nevada mentioned other benefits associated with randomly selecting claimants for their current state-funded program. First, according to officials, the state-funded reemployment program deters continued fraudulent claim filing for claimants who have been selected and may have returned to work or filed an initial claim using stolen personally identifiable information. Additionally, random selection allows researchers to compare outcomes for those who received services to outcomes for a control group that did not.

In contrast, officials in three other selected states emphasized the benefits of in-person service provision.³⁴ In Nebraska, officials said in-person meetings help one-stop center staff observe a claimant’s potential employment barriers that might otherwise be hard to identify. Officials provided an example of a claimant who seemed well-positioned on paper to obtain employment, but in person clearly lacked good interviewing skills, prompting the caseworker to refer the claimant to additional interviewing support. In Texas, officials said in-person service provision, where possible, also helps promote program integrity as it enables caseworkers to more easily set the expectation that claimants must search for work to qualify for UI benefits.³⁵ Additionally, officials in Nevada said establishing a personal connection with claimants can help one-stop staff encourage those struggling with the experience of applying for dozens of jobs online without receiving any feedback from prospective employers (see text box).

A Local Official’s View on Individual Services:

“The one-on-one services provided under [the state’s various reemployment programs] accommodate diversity among claimants much better than group-provided services.”

—*Local one-stop center official in Nevada*

Source: GAO interview with local one-stop center officials. | GAO-18-633

Officials in the six selected states also described varying approaches in the extent to which they provide reemployment services in group settings or on an individual basis. In RESEA guidance, DOL has encouraged the use of group services as a way to enhance efficiency, and officials in four selected states said they conduct group orientations through their primary reemployment programs.³⁶ For example, in Massachusetts, officials said that all UI claimants attend a group Career Center Seminar, where one-

³⁴In Massachusetts, the sixth selected state, officials said they provided both online and in-person services, but did not mention particular benefits of or preferences for one method over the other.

³⁵Texas officials noted that in rural areas the significant distances needed to travel to attend in-person meetings makes in-person service delivery challenging, and in these cases remote services can also be effective.

³⁶While RESEA-funded caseworkers are required to meet individually with claimants, states have the option to provide other RESEA services in individual or group settings, and DOL’s RESEA guidance suggests that providing group services could be a potential cost-saving strategy.

stop center staff provide an overview of available reemployment services and local labor market conditions, and UI claimants complete a needs assessment and career action plan. In Nebraska, a caseworker said the use of group orientations is a strength of the state's program because it provides an opportunity for claimants to discuss shared challenges and network with each other. In contrast, Nevada provides all services through its primary reemployment program individually, which officials said they believe is more effective than group service provision. Officials said that during these individual meetings, caseworkers identify each claimant's barriers to employment and assess whether the claimant needs ongoing individual case management or if additional service referrals would be appropriate.³⁷

Selected States Leverage Technology and Integrate Program Resources to Help Improve Services

Leveraging Technology

Officials from all six selected states said they use technology and integrate resources from across federally funded workforce programs as strategies that help enhance efficiency and improve UI claimant customer experiences.

To help provide services more cost-effectively and enhance service delivery capacity, officials in two selected states, Utah and Wisconsin, said they invested resources into expanding the array of online self-service options available to UI claimants. Utah officials said the state increased its use of technology to meet heightened service demand during the Great Recession, and continues to encourage online self-services as a cost-effective, fiscally sustainable means of maintaining service levels with fewer staff. Similarly, officials in Wisconsin said the state's enhanced self-service options are central to its strategy for meeting current UI claimant needs and prepare the state for potential increases in UI claimant demand in an economic downturn.³⁸

Officials in five selected states said they have also used technology to help make services more customer-friendly, including the four selected states in which officials described improvements to their online job banks.

³⁷According to program documentation and information from state officials, in Utah each RESEA participant completes online requirements, including an orientation, and then attends a personalized meeting with a caseworker. RESEA participants may subsequently be referred to group workshops on relevant reemployment topics.

³⁸According to officials, in 2013, Wisconsin initiated a redesign of its reemployment service delivery model that involved modernizing the technology used to serve claimants and expanding self-service options.

One of these states, Nebraska, added a mobile job bank application that, according to officials, has made it easier for UI claimants to use job bank features on their mobile devices and allows them to search for postings within a certain radius of their physical location. Nevada and Wisconsin officials also described other investments in mobile technology. Nevada, for instance, plans to implement a tool that will allow UI claimants to communicate with caseworkers via text message, such as by sending a picture of their first paystub to document that they found a job. Additionally, Wisconsin implemented a self-scheduling feature for initial RESEA meetings as part of broader upgrades to the state's UI and workforce data systems.

Officials in all six selected states said they use technology to help caseworkers maximize their time. For example, officials in four states said integrating their state UI and workforce data systems has enabled them to automate some caseworker responsibilities.³⁹ In Massachusetts and Wisconsin, officials said data system integration allows caseworkers to instantly transfer relevant information from the workforce data system to the UI data system, enabling them, for instance, to automatically trigger UI adjudication proceedings after a UI claimant fails to meet RESEA requirements. Officials from Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Utah said their online self-scheduling features help save time that caseworkers would otherwise spend scheduling and rescheduling missed appointments. (See text box.) Officials in four selected states said they also use technological tools to help caseworkers focus their time on providing individualized services. For example, Nebraska developed a series of orientation videos designed to deliver clear, standardized information on job search requirements and available resources for claimants. As a result, caseworkers who manage in-person orientation sessions are able to focus on answering participant questions and emphasizing key information.

³⁹In general, some states are working to improve outdated UI data systems' capabilities through IT modernization, and we have previously reported on challenges they face in doing so. See GAO, *Unemployment Insurance: States' Customer Service Challenges and DOL's Related Assistance*, [GAO-16-430](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 12, 2016).

Program Integration

State Spotlight: Self-Scheduling Tool

Wisconsin officials said their online self-scheduling tool for participants in the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program has both freed up staff time and increased RESEA attendance rates. According to data provided by state officials, the percentage of scheduled RESEA meetings attended by claimants increased from about 69 percent in 2014 to 87 percent in 2016. Officials attributed this increase to the implementation of the self-scheduling tool in March 2015.

Source: GAO interview with state officials. | GAO-18-633

Officials from all six selected states cited the benefits, such as improving UI claimant access to services, of enhancing program integration.⁴⁰ Officials from four selected states said they aim to improve UI claimants' customer experience using a "no wrong door" service delivery framework in which one-stop center staff guide claimants and other job seekers to the services they need without requiring them to approach different siloed programs for services (see text box). Additionally, officials from three selected states said state workforce agencies work behind the scenes using integrated budgeting, or "braided funding," to align the appropriate federal resources so one-stop center staff can focus on service provision rather than funding source constraints. Officials in Utah and Wisconsin said integrated budgeting helped them support system-wide improvements, such as IT updates. For example, Wisconsin state officials said they strategically set aside funding from multiple programs to support the technology upgrades needed for a redesign of their reemployment program.

State Spotlight: Program Integration

Massachusetts cross-trains one-stop center staff on available workforce programs to increase collaboration and make the experiences of "shared" customers—those who receive services from more than one program—more seamless.

Source: GAO interview with state officials. | GAO-18-633

Finally, officials from all six of our selected states said that the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service—a federally funded workforce program that can be used to support any job seeker—is a critical federal resource that they use in conjunction with other workforce programs to meet the needs of UI claimants specifically. These six selected states described using the

⁴⁰Some workforce system reforms under WIOA are designed to increase coordination among agencies and programs so that job seekers have more seamless access to services.

Wagner-Peyser Employment Service for a wide range of functions, including expanding reemployment service provision to claimants, supporting one-stop center staff or computer labs, and maintaining continuity of RESEA operations in periods of funding uncertainty.⁴¹

States Served UI Claimants through Four Key Federally Funded Workforce Programs, but Data on Reemployment Service Expenditures Are Not Available

States Report that They Most Often Served UI Claimants through the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service

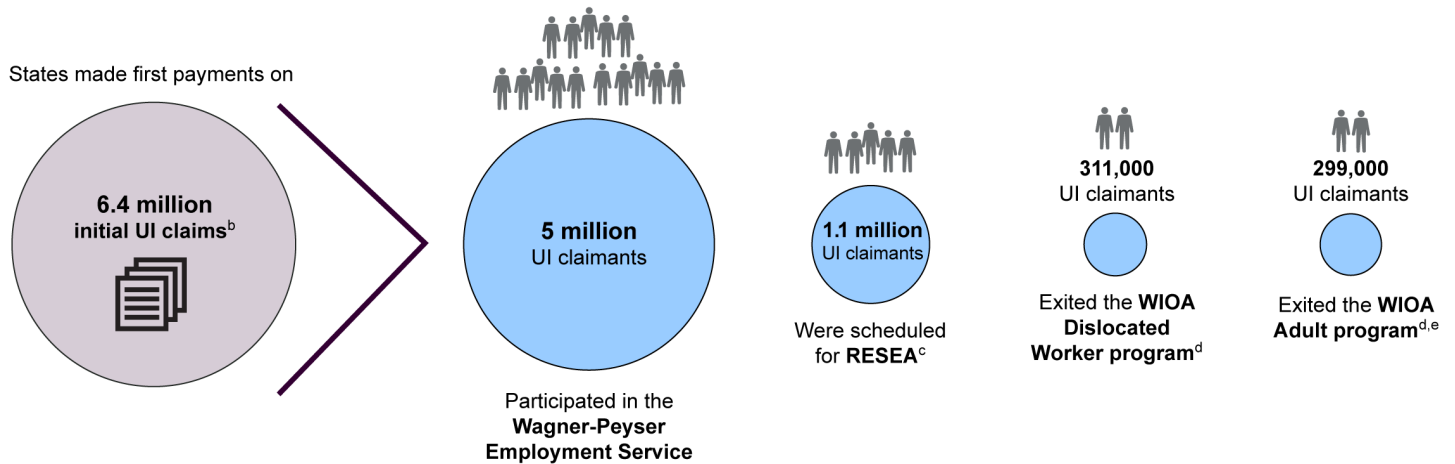
In program year 2015 (July 2015 through June 2016), states reported providing services to UI claimants through four key federally funded workforce programs, most often the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service, followed by RESEA, the WIOA Dislocated Worker program, and the WIOA Adult program (see fig. 2).⁴² (See appendix I for selected state participation data.)⁴³

⁴¹Officials from two selected states said that in some years, the state used Wagner-Peyser funds to support RESEA operations when the disbursement of the RESEA grant was later than anticipated.

⁴²Over this time period, states reported the UI claimant status of service recipients in these four programs, as well as the WIOA Youth program, which is available to certain youth. We did not include the WIOA Youth program in our analysis because few service recipients were reported to be UI claimants. DOL has recently begun collecting information on the UI claimant status of participants in a wider variety of federally funded workforce programs, but these data were not available when we conducted our analysis.

⁴³We did not include Nevada in our selected state snapshots because state officials reported that data system limitations prevented them from accurately identifying, in some cases, which program participants were UI claimants during this time period. Nevada officials reported these data system limitations have since been resolved.

Figure 2: Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claimants Served by States through Key Federally Funded Workforce Programs, Program Year 2015^a



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Labor (DOL) data. | GAO-18-633

^aProgram year 2015 runs from July 2015 through June 2016. UI claimants may be served by states through more than one of the federally funded workforce programs listed above.

^bDOL officials said they use first payments to approximate the number of UI claimants. However, an individual may have more than one period of employment and file more than one successful claim in a year. As a result, the number of first payments could be higher than the number of individual claimants in a given year.

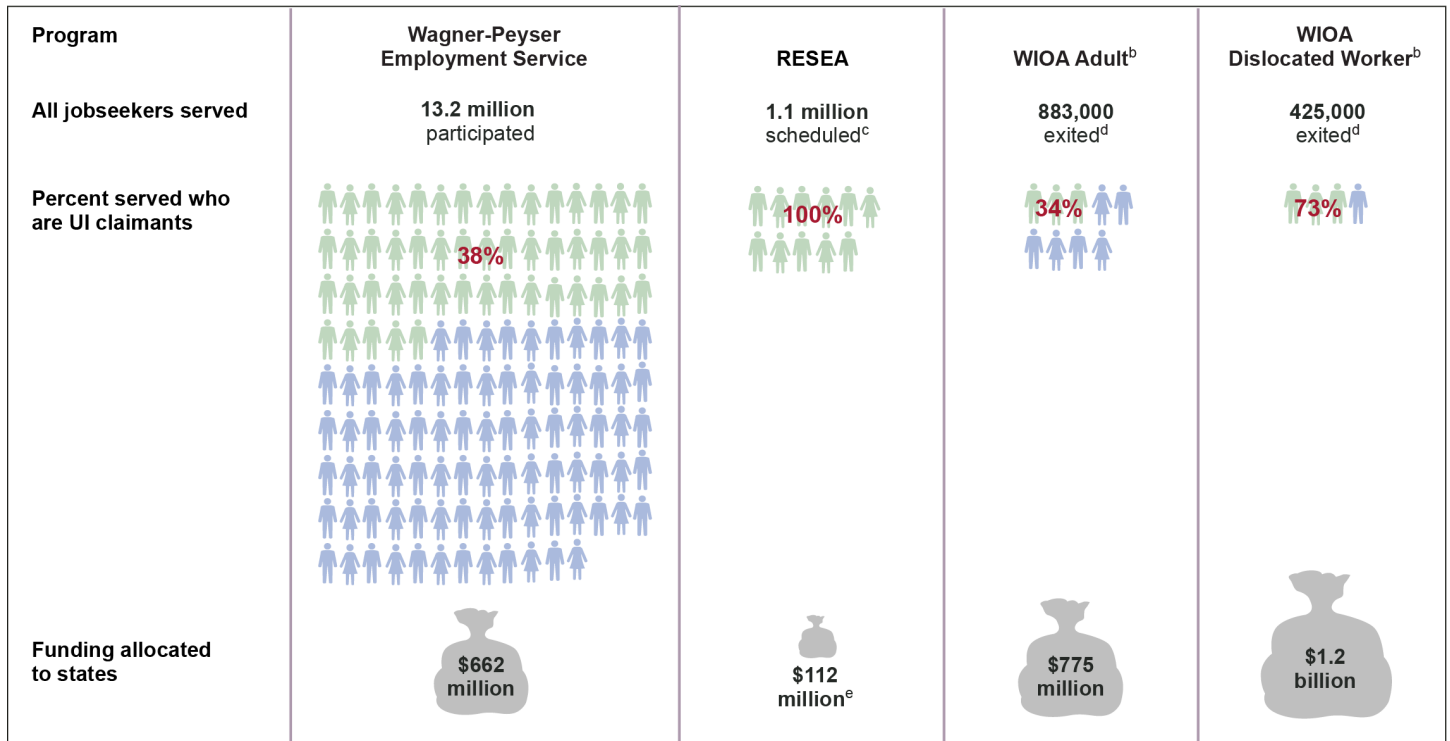
^cDOL data do not capture the unique number of UI claimants served through the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. As a result, DOL officials said the number of claimants scheduled to attend RESEA is the best available measure of service receipt.

^dProgram year 2015 data for the Dislocated Worker program and Adult program were reported by states under Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) performance measures. However, we refer to these as Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs to reflect the fact that WIOA repealed WIA as of July 1, 2015. In addition, individuals are considered to have "exited" a WIA or WIOA program if they have not received any services for at least 90 days and no future services are planned. Since the date of program exit is not known until the participant has gone 90 days without receiving services, exit data are lagged one quarter. As a result, the exit data here are tracked from April 2015 through March 2016.

^eAlthough states were permitted to count individuals who received self-services only as Adult program participants under WIA, such participants were removed from counts of individuals exiting the program to facilitate cross-state comparisons.

States likewise served the largest number of all job seekers through the federally funded Wagner-Peyser Employment Service in program year 2015, followed by RESEA, the WIOA Adult program, and the WIOA Dislocated Worker program. The proportion of service recipients who were UI claimants, and the amount of DOL funding provided to states under these programs, also varied (see fig. 3).

Figure 3: Participant Characteristics and Total DOL Funding Allotted to States for Key Federally Funded Workforce Programs, Program Year 2015^a



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Labor (DOL) data. | GAO-18-633

^aProgram year 2015 runs from July 2015 through June 2016. UI claimants may be served by states through more than one of the federally funded workforce programs listed above.

^bAlthough Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) performance measures were still in effect in program year 2015, we use the terms Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult program and WIOA Dislocated Worker program to reflect the fact that WIA was repealed by WIOA as of July 1, 2015.

^cDOL data do not capture the unique number of unemployment insurance (UI) claimants served through the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. As a result, DOL officials said the number of claimants scheduled to attend RESEA is the best available measure of service receipt.

^dIndividuals are considered to have “exited” a WIA or WIOA program if they have not received any services for at least 90 days and no future services are planned. Since the date of program exit is not known until the participant has gone 90 days without receiving services, exit data are lagged one quarter. As a result, the exit data here are tracked from April 2015 through March 2016.

^eRESEA funds are generally distributed according to calendar year; DOL provided about \$81 million in RESEA funds to states for calendar year 2015, and \$112 million for calendar year 2016, which is the amount shown here.

Wagner-Peyser Employment Service

The following sections discuss these programs in more detail.

States make available a wide variety of self- and staff-assisted services to all job seekers, including UI claimants, through the federally funded Wagner-Peyser Employment Service.

Self-services include:

- state online job banks, and
- computer resource rooms.

Staff-assisted services include:

- job referrals to local employers,
- career counseling,⁴⁴ and
- job search workshops.

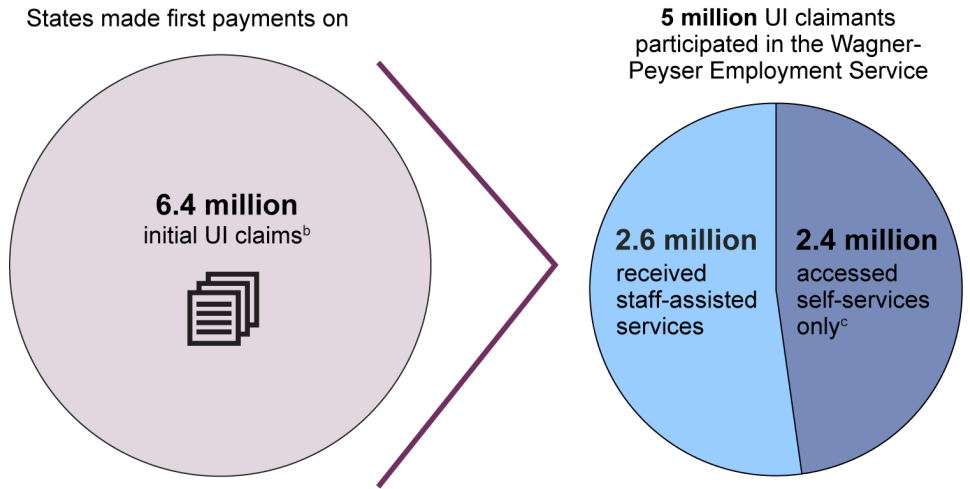
A total of 13.2 million job seekers, including 5 million UI claimants, participated in the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service in program year 2015.⁴⁵ Among participating UI claimants, just under half accessed self-services only, while the other half received staff-assisted services (see fig. 4). DOL officials said that UI claimants, who are generally required to actively search for work, are also usually required to register with their state's online job bank.⁴⁶ Officials also said states generally counted such job bank users as Wagner-Peyser Employment Service participants even if they did not receive staff-assisted services.

⁴⁴State Wagner-Peyser Employment Service staff may also conduct one-on-one meetings with UI claimants selected for RESEA.

⁴⁵Additionally, a DOL official noted that the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service and the UI program were created alongside each other in the 1930s and were intended to be companions. UI claimants often visited Employment Service locations in-person before the rise of phone and internet-based claims filing, and the Employment Service continues to assess whether UI claimants meet work search requirements. WIOA, which was enacted in 2014, revised the Wagner-Peyser Act to emphasize UI claimants are a part of the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service's intended service population. Pub. L. No. 113-128, § 305(a), 128 Stat. 1425, 1626.

⁴⁶Under new WIOA reporting guidelines, individuals who access self-services only, such as those who register with and use their state's online job bank to search and apply for work, are excluded from the definition of a participant, and are instead considered "reportable individuals."

Figure 4: Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claimants Served by States through the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service, Program Year 2015^a



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Labor (DOL) data. | GAO-18-633

^aProgram year 2015 runs from July 2015 through June 2016.

^bDOL officials said they use first payments to approximate the number of UI claimants in a year. However, an individual may have more than one period of employment and file more than one successful claim in a year. As a result, the number of first payments could be higher than the number of individual UI claimants in a given year.

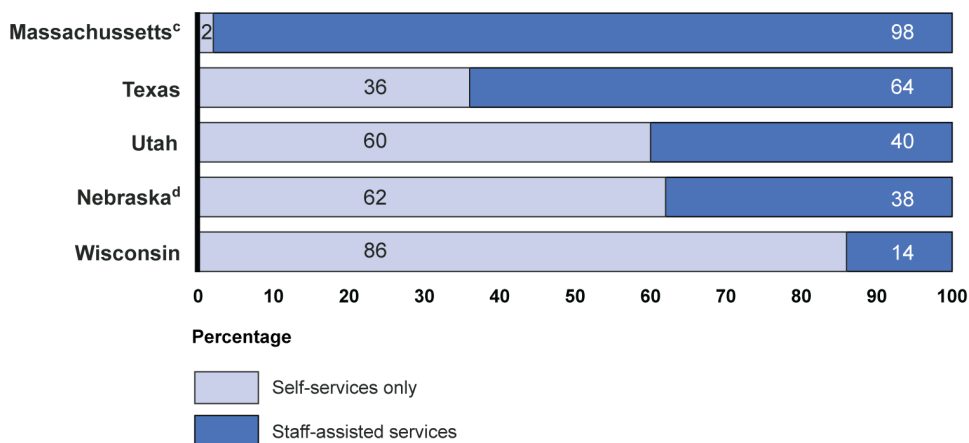
^cUnder Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) reporting guidelines in effect in program year 2015, self-service-only participation occurred when individuals served themselves by accessing services either in a physical location or remotely via the use of electronic technologies, with little to no staff involvement. Staff-assisted participation is characterized by significant staff involvement, including a staff member's assessment of a participant's skills, education, or career objectives. Under new WIOA reporting guidelines, individuals who access self-services only are excluded from the definition of a participant and are instead considered "reportable individuals."

Our five selected states for which reliable data were available differed in the extent to which they reported providing self- versus staff-assisted services to UI claimants through the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service over the review period (see fig. 5).⁴⁷ For example, in Massachusetts,

⁴⁷As noted earlier in the report, states had flexibility in determining what qualified as Wagner-Peyser Employment Service participation over the review period, which limits the comparability of participant counts across states. We asked officials from each of our six selected states for insights into their Wagner-Peyser Employment Service UI claimant participant counts, and have described reasons for discrepancies, as appropriate. Additionally, we are not presenting data from one selected state, Nevada, because officials reported that data system limitations prevented them from accurately identifying, in some cases, which program participants were UI claimants during this time period. Nevada officials also reported these data system limitations have since been resolved.

officials said all UI claimants who meet screening criteria are required to participate in reemployment services at a one-stop center, and almost all participating claimants were reported to have received staff-assisted services in program year 2015.⁴⁸ By contrast, Utah and Wisconsin, states where officials said they had invested in expanded online self-services, such as virtual workshops, reported that most claimants accessed self-services only.

Figure 5: Percent of Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claimants Served through the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service Who Received Self- versus Staff-Assisted Services, in Five Selected States, Program Year 2015^{a, b}



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Labor (DOL) data. | GAO-18-633

^aProgram year 2015 runs from July 2015 through June 2016.

^bUnder Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) reporting guidelines, self-service-only participation occurred when individuals accessed services either in a physical location or remotely via the use of electronic technologies, with little to no staff involvement. Staff-assisted participation is characterized by significant staff involvement in service provision, including a staff member’s assessment of a participant’s skills, education, or career objectives. Under new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) reporting guidelines, individuals who access self-services only are excluded from the definition of a participant and are instead considered “reportable individuals.”

^cIn Massachusetts, all UI claimants who meet screening criteria receive in-person reemployment services at a one-stop center. Massachusetts state officials also said that job bank users who did not

⁴⁸Massachusetts state officials also said that among job bank users who did not access other services, only those who specified their interest in a job by clicking a button were considered Wagner-Peyser Employment Service participants during this time period. Similar to Massachusetts, all UI claimants in Nebraska, with certain exceptions, also receive in-person reemployment services at a one-stop center. However, officials reported that Nebraska’s service model was fairly new in program year 2015, and said they believed the actual percent of UI claimants who received staff-assisted services was higher than the 38 percent reported. They attributed the possible underreporting to user error in properly reporting staff-assisted service receipt.

access other services were not counted as participants or self-service recipients unless they clicked a button in the job bank to specify their interest in a job.

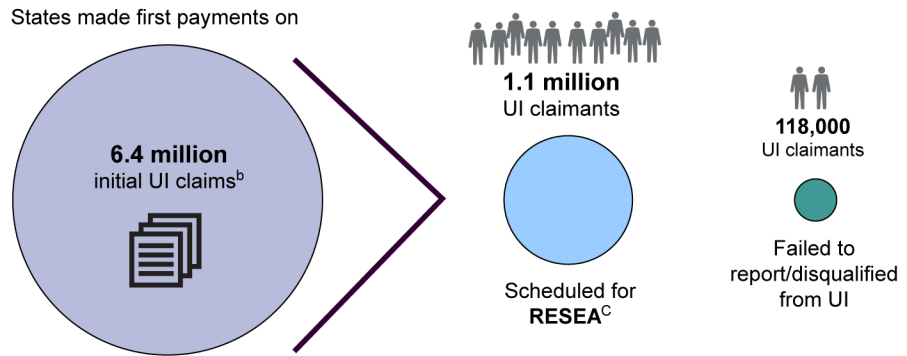
⁴⁹In Nebraska, all UI claimants who meet screening criteria receive in-person reemployment services at a one-stop center. However, officials reported that Nebraska's service model was fairly new in program year 2015 and said they believed the actual percent of UI claimants who received staff-assisted services was higher than reported. They attributed the possible underreporting to user error in properly reporting staff-assisted service receipt.

RESEA

In program year 2015, over 1.1 million UI claimants in 45 states and the District of Columbia were scheduled to receive services through the federally funded RESEA program, which generally includes a one-stop orientation and a one-on-one meeting with a caseworker (see fig. 6).⁴⁹ (Because RESEA is designated for UI claimants only, 100 percent of those scheduled were UI claimants.) About 118,000 claimants were disqualified from receiving UI benefits because they failed to report to their state's RESEA program. DOL's guidance states that it strongly suggests that states take actions to reduce RESEA no-show rates, for instance, through creating self-scheduling tools that allow claimants to select an appointment time that works for them and sending clearly worded appointment reminders.

⁴⁹Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands also reported scheduling UI claimants for RESEA over this time period. While DOL awards RESEA grant funds on a calendar year basis, we analyzed quarterly RESEA participation data for the quarters covering program year 2015 (July 2015 through June 2016) to facilitate comparison with participation data for the other programs we reviewed.

Figure 6: Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claimants Scheduled to Receive Services from States through the RESEA Program and Disqualified from Receiving UI Benefits for Failure to Report, Program Year 2015^a



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Labor (DOL) data. | GAO-18-633

^aProgram year 2015 runs from July 2015 through June 2016.

^bDOL officials said they use first payments to approximate the number of UI claimants. However, an individual may have more than one period of employment and file more than one successful claim in a year. As a result, the number of first payments could be higher than the number of individual UI claimants in a given year.

^cDOL data do not capture the unique number of UI claimants served through the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. As a result, DOL officials said the number of claimants scheduled to receive services through RESEA is the best available measure of service receipt.

During the period under review, DOL asked states to transition to selecting UI claimants identified as most likely to exhaust their benefits and veterans who are UCX claimants for services under RESEA.⁵⁰ By 2017, when states were required to target these groups for RESEA, the number of states serving UI claimants through RESEA had grown to 49, and included all of our selected states.⁵¹

WIOA Dislocated Worker Program and WIOA Adult Program

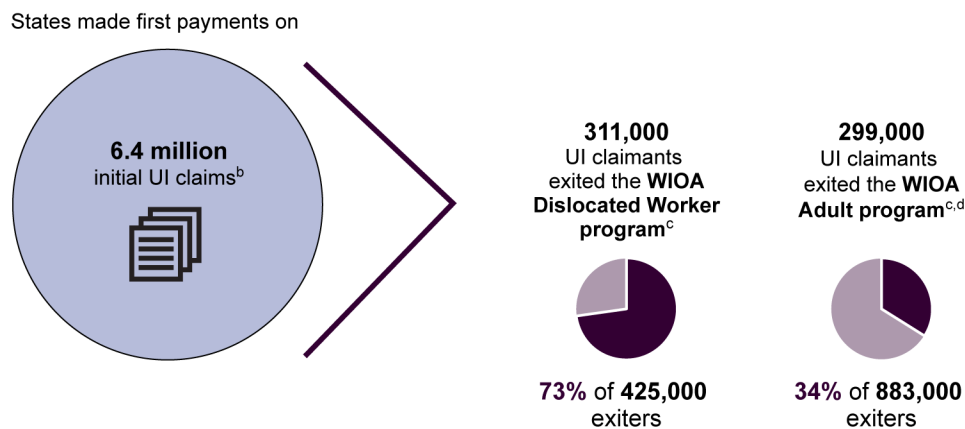
In program year 2015, about 311,000 UI claimants exited, or finished participating in, the WIOA Dislocated Worker program and 299,000 exited the WIOA Adult program (see fig. 7). UI claimants comprised the majority of those who exited from the Dislocated Worker program, which is designated for unemployed individuals who are eligible for UI benefits or

⁵⁰According to DOL officials, previously, states that participated in RESEA's predecessor program, REA, had flexibility to choose how to target UI claimants for services.

⁵¹The District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands also participated in RESEA in 2017.

have exhausted their UI benefits, among others. In contrast, UI claimants comprised a smaller share of those who exited from the WIOA Adult program. This program prioritizes individuals who are low-income or lack basic skills needed to function on the job, among other criteria, for certain services.⁵² UI claimants might not meet these criteria because, according to DOL guidance, income from UI benefit payments is included in calculations used to determine whether an individual is low-income. Additionally, UI claimants have obtained employment in the past and so may have the basic skills needed to obtain employment again in the future.

Figure 7: Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claimants Exiting the WIOA Dislocated Worker program and WIOA Adult Program, Program Year 2015^a



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Labor (DOL) data. | GAO-18-633

^aProgram year 2015 runs from July 2015 through June 2016.

^bDOL officials said they use first payments to approximate the number of UI claimants in a year. However, an individual may have more than one period of employment and file more than one successful claim in a year. As a result, the number of first payments could be higher than the number of individual UI claimants in a given year.

^cProgram year 2015 data for the Dislocated Worker program and Adult program were reported by states under Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) performance measures. However, we refer to these as Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs to reflect the fact that WIOA repealed WIA as of July 1, 2015. In addition, individuals are considered to have “exited” a WIA or WIOA program if they have not received any services for at least 90 days and no future services are planned. Since the date of program exit is not known until the participant has gone 90 days without

⁵²Specifically, the WIOA Adult program prioritizes recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient for certain career and training services. Basic skills deficient, with respect to an adult, means that the adult is unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual’s family, or in society.

receiving services, exit data are lagged one quarter. As a result, the exit data here are tracked from April 2015 through March 2016.

^dAlthough states were permitted to count individuals who received self-services only as Adult program participants under WIA, such participants were removed from counts of individuals exiting the program to facilitate cross-state comparisons.

States served far fewer UI claimants through the WIOA Dislocated Worker program and WIOA Adult program over our review period compared to the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service and RESEA, despite greater funding allocations. Officials from three of our six selected states said they frequently refer UI claimants who need more extensive services, such as ongoing case management or worker retraining, to the WIOA Dislocated Worker program or WIOA Adult program.⁵³ DOL officials agreed that such services may be more costly on a per-participant basis than typical services funded by the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service and RESEA programs, and may contribute to the lower numbers served. One official also said unlike claimants selected for the RESEA program, claimants referred to programs like the WIOA Dislocated Worker program and WIOA Adult program are not required to participate, and may ultimately choose not to enroll. Further, officials in two states described the WIOA eligibility determination process as burdensome for prospective participants. A key official in one state said he preferred providing services through other means, such as the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service, which is open to all job seekers and does not require an eligibility determination.⁵⁴

Among our five selected states for which reliable data were available, only Utah reported a substantial share of UI claimants exiting a WIOA program in program year 2015. In Utah, the number of claimants exiting the WIOA Adult program was nearly one third the number of new claims

⁵³States can use funding from the WIOA Dislocated Worker program and WIOA Adult program to provide services and training, while the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service and RESEA can be used to provide non-training services only.

⁵⁴While the WIOA Adult program is technically available to all job seekers, local areas must prioritize low-income individuals, public assistance recipients, and individuals who are basic skills deficient for receipt of certain career services and training services, and states must monitor local areas' compliance with this priority.

paid by the state in program year 2015.⁵⁵ According to DOL officials, some states (for example, Utah) that focus on providing online self-services through the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service enroll more participants in WIOA programs.⁵⁶

Selected States Do Not Track All Reemployment Service Spending on UI Claimants, and DOL Officials Said Such Tracking Would Be Burdensome

Officials from all six of our selected states said their accounting systems did not generally track expenses by the UI claimant status of jobseekers served, and as a result, they could not isolate all reemployment service spending on UI claimants specifically. For instance, Utah officials said they allocated workforce system costs across multiple funding streams by surveying staff members about their activities at random moments in time. Officials said that while a jobseeker's UI claimant status may be relevant to some staff time charges (such as helping a jobseeker apply for UI benefits), it would not be relevant, or even known, in other cases (such as providing computer lab assistance).

Officials from DOL said it would be burdensome for states to track and report workforce program expenditures on reemployment services provided to UI claimants specifically, as states have flexibility to use funds from multiple federal sources on services to both claimants and other jobseekers. DOL officials said they believe states mainly rely on RESEA, Wagner-Peyser, WIOA Dislocated Worker, and WIOA Adult funds to support UI claimant reemployment services. DOL has also reported that some states, including one of our selected states (Nevada), collect taxes designated for purposes that may include reemployment services.⁵⁷

Our six selected states also provided some UI claimant reemployment services through their primary reemployment programs, and five of these

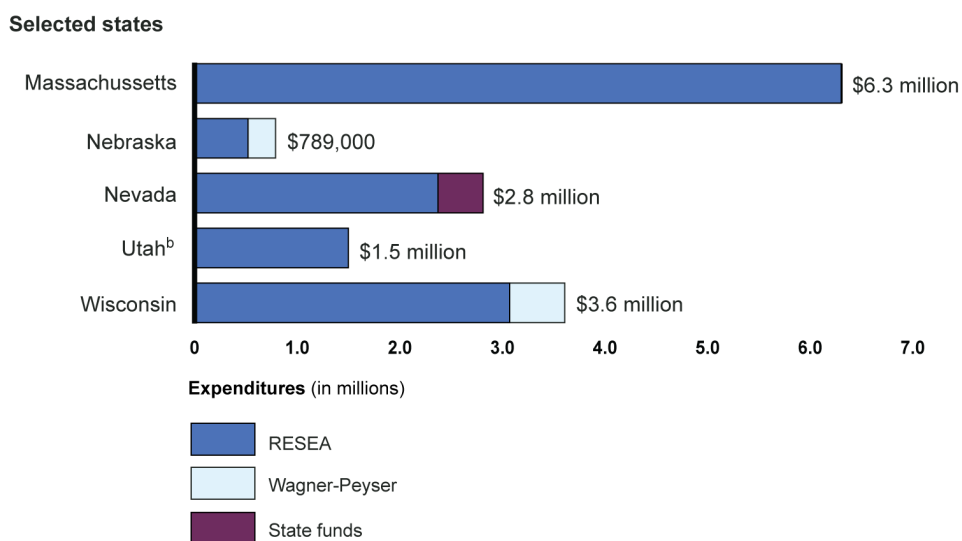
⁵⁵In Utah, 11,758 UI claimants exited the WIOA Adult program from April 2015 through March 2016. Over the same time period, the state made payments on 38,590 new claims, representing roughly one exit per every 3 new claims paid. By comparison, the number of claimants exiting the WIOA Adult program in other selected states ranged from 1 exit per every 119 new claims paid in Texas to 1 exit per every 556 new claims paid in Massachusetts. See appendix I for selected state participation data.

⁵⁶Although states were permitted to count individuals who received self-services only as participants in the Adult program under WIA, such individuals were removed from counts of participants exiting the program to facilitate cross-state comparison.

⁵⁷In its 2017 comparison of state UI laws, DOL lists a number of states with taxes designated for UI administration or non-UI purposes, including job training and reemployment services.

states were able to provide us with summary expenditure data from these programs.⁵⁸ These five states chiefly leveraged RESEA funds to support these programs in state fiscal year 2017, and three states supplemented RESEA funds with funds from other sources (see fig. 8).⁵⁹

Figure 8: Expenditures under Selected States' Primary Reemployment Programs for Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claimants,^a State Fiscal Year 2017



Source: GAO analysis of state reported expenditure data. | GAO-18-633

^aExpenditures under these programs only account for some UI claimant reemployment service spending by selected states. In particular, these data do not include spending on services provided remotely or through self-service; by one-stop center staff available to help any jobseeker; or through partner programs, like the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult program and WIOA Dislocated Worker program.

^bUtah expenditures provided are for federal fiscal year 2017, not state fiscal year 2017.

⁵⁸In our selected states, officials described these programs as serving UI claimants and generally following the RESEA service model, which includes an orientation session and one-on-one caseworker meetings. These programs account for some, but not all, reemployment service spending on UI claimants. Specifically, they do not include reemployment service expenditures provided 1) online or through self-service (e.g., a computer resource room); 2) by one-stop center staff available to help any jobseeker; or 3) through partner programs, like the WIOA Adult program and WIOA Dislocated Worker program.

⁵⁹Officials in Texas, the only state that did not provide expenditure data, said that local workforce agencies previously offered reemployment services to UI claimants using Wagner-Peyser funds, but the state did not track these expenditures. Texas was just beginning to participate in RESEA, and had not yet expended any grant funds.

Of the three states that supplement RESEA funds with other sources, two (Nebraska and Wisconsin) used Wagner-Peyser funds, and one (Nevada) used state funds. Nebraska officials said they leveraged flexible Wagner-Peyser funds to enable the state to serve all UI claimants through its primary reemployment program. Wisconsin officials said that they, too, used Wagner-Peyser funds to expand the capacity of their state's primary reemployment program, but did not aim to serve all UI claimants.⁶⁰ Nevada officials said they used state funds from an employer payroll tax to provide reemployment services to randomly selected UI claimants not already selected for RESEA.⁶¹

⁶⁰National research also indicates that many states use Wagner-Peyser funds to provide reemployment services to UI claimants. Specifically, three-quarters of states and jurisdictions responding to a 2013 National Association of State Workforce Agencies survey (35 of 46) said they used some of their program year 2012 Wagner-Peyser funding allocations for this purpose. National Association of State Workforce Agencies, *The State Role in the Public Workforce Development System: Evidence from a Survey on the Use of Wagner-Peyser Act Funding* (2013).

⁶¹Officials said this 0.05 percent employer payroll tax is used to support several reemployment initiatives, including the state's reemployment program for randomly selected UI claimants.

States Use Different Profiling Systems to Target UI Claimants for Services, but DOL Has Not Collected Needed Information or Fully Advised States about Profiling Options

States Use a Range of Practices to Profile UI Claimants for Reemployment Services

Past national studies and our review of information from nine selected states indicate that the practices used by states to profile, or identify, UI claimants who are most likely to exhaust their benefits and need assistance returning to work differ. A 2007 DOL-sponsored study and a 2014 follow-up questionnaire to states found that, nationally, a large majority of states reported using statistical profiling systems, while a few states used a type of non-statistical profiling system known as a characteristic screen.⁶² (See text boxes.) The 2007 study also found that the performance of states' profiling systems varied widely. Specifically, while some systems predicted claimants' likelihood of benefit exhaustion relatively well, others did not perform much better than random chance. Accepted statistical practices recommend that profiling systems be updated regularly, and DOL has recommended that states update their profiling systems every 2 to 4 years. However, more than half of states

⁶²The 2007 U.S. Department of Labor-commissioned study found that 46 of 53 agencies (from all 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands) reported using statistical models, while 7 agencies reported using characteristic screens. Sullivan, Coffey, Kolovich, et al., *Worker Profiling*. In 2014, researchers at Rutgers University's John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development asked state agencies to provide an update on their responses to the 2007 questionnaire. We analyzed state responses from the 2014 questionnaire, and found that 31 of 33 responding states reported using statistical systems, while 3 reported using characteristic screens. (One of these states reported using both a statistical system and a characteristic screen.)

that responded to the 2014 questionnaire reported that they had not updated their systems since before 2008.⁶³

Statistical Profiling Systems

Statistical profiling systems predict each unemployment insurance (UI) claimant's likelihood of exhausting benefits based on claimant characteristics (see examples below), which are each assigned weights through a statistical process. The system produces a ranked list, and claimants with the highest predicted likelihood of exhausting benefits are selected for reemployment services.

Sample Characteristics Used to Predict Benefit Exhaustion

- Education level
- Prior occupation
- Weeks of UI benefits used in the past 3 years
- Job tenure

Source: GAO interview with state officials and review of system documentation and Department of Labor guidance. | GAO-18-633

Non-Statistical Profiling Systems (example: Characteristic Screen)

Non-statistical profiling systems select claimants for services using a process that does not rely on statistical analysis. One example of these, characteristic screens, sort unemployment insurance (UI) claimants into two groups, based on the presence of certain characteristics (see examples below). Claimants with one or more of these characteristics are considered not likely to exhaust their benefits, and are excluded from service requirements. Remaining claimants are considered likely to exhaust their benefits, and a subset is randomly selected for reemployment services.

Sample Characteristics Used to Exclude Claimants from Service Requirements

- Claimant lives out of state and beyond established commuting area
- Claimant is only seasonally unemployed
- Claimant is approved to participate in a training program

Source: GAO interview with state officials and review of Department of Labor guidance. | GAO-18-633

Of the nine selected states whose profiling systems we reviewed, six use statistical systems and three use non-statistical systems, and profiling practices vary widely, even among states using the same type of

⁶³Specifically, 18 of 32 responding states reported that they had not updated the structure of their profiling systems since before 2008, and 20 of 34 responding states reported that they had not updated the data, or inputs, used in their systems since before 2008. These counts reflect self-reported state practices as of 2014, which may have changed since that time.

system.⁶⁴ The six states with statistical systems have varying levels of system sophistication, and different system assessment and updating practices. For example, officials in one state said they invested substantial time and resources in building a sophisticated statistical profiling system and assessing its performance. To maintain the system, officials said they update it biannually through a yearlong, resource-intensive process.⁶⁵ Officials described this process as important, noting that employer needs and the economy change over time, as do other factors that influence UI claimants' likelihood of exhausting their benefits. State officials further said that as part of a large umbrella agency with oversight of numerous federal workforce programs, they have the resources needed to sustain a centralized data office with the capacity to build and maintain a sophisticated statistical system.

Officials in another state told us they had recently replaced their sophisticated statistical profiling system, which was based on the principles of machine learning, with a new, more straightforward, statistical system.⁶⁶ While DOL officials said the state's prior system was innovative, state officials said that after the person who developed it left the agency, they did not know how to update it. The official charged with developing the state's new profiling system said he had to re-familiarize himself with statistical modeling practices in order to build it, and that it took months to complete. State officials said they had not yet established a performance assessment and updating process for the new system, and that they would need to gather additional data and determine how to address certain analytical challenges before doing so.

Officials from a third state agency said they were using a statistical profiling system that had not been updated in over 25 years, and had

⁶⁴We interviewed officials from nine selected states regarding their profiling systems, including the six previously discussed and three additional states, selected because they worked with external partners to develop their profiling systems or had systems DOL officials identified as innovative. We also reviewed states' profiling system documentation, where available.

⁶⁵Officials said that through this process, data experts work with a group of workforce and UI staff to plan for, build, and test the new model. They identify new variables that may be useful in predicting benefit exhaustion, prepare a model proposal, clean and format new data for inclusion in the model, build the model, assess and review the model, and finally, incorporate the model into the UI data system.

⁶⁶This machine learning-based model processes information in a way modeled after the human brain and can "learn" how to identify patterns and make predictions by analyzing training data.

asked DOL to help them develop a new statistical profiling system because they lacked the expertise to do so themselves. In March 2017, DOL provided the new system to the contractor that maintains the state's UI data system and will be responsible for running the new system. However, in June 2018, state officials told us they had delayed implementing the new system until the state completed a UI modernization project. Further, while state officials said they plan to keep the system up-to-date once implemented, they acknowledged that they do not have staff with the skills to do so, and will likely need continued DOL support.

For the three selected states that use non-statistical profiling systems, state officials said that these systems generally require little effort to maintain. Officials in two of these states reported using characteristic screens, which sort claimants into two groups to identify and exempt from service requirements those claimants who meet certain conditions, such as being only temporarily unemployed or in an approved training program. An official from each state said they aim to serve all non-exempt claimants through their reemployment programs.

The third state recently implemented a non-statistical claimant needs assessment that replaced the state's outdated statistical profiling system, which officials said had never been updated and was only used to comply with the federal profiling requirement. With the new needs assessment, claimant responses to questions such as, "Do you have a resume?" and "How many job interviews have you had in the last month?" are scored to determine whether the claimant is job-ready or needs reemployment services. (See text box.) Caseworkers can also use these responses to make more effective service referrals during their appointments with claimants. For instance, if a claimant reported not having a current resume, a caseworker might refer the claimant to a resume workshop. In addition, officials said that program administrators can easily adjust the scoring and weights used in the assessment, and that they review it each year for potential updates.

Sample Alternative Non-Statistical Profiling System (Needs Assessment)

One selected state's claimant needs assessment scores claimant responses to a questionnaire about job readiness to determine if claimants need reemployment services. Those responses also provide caseworkers with direct information about claimant needs.

Sample Needs Assessment Questions

- How long have you been looking for work?
- Do you have a cover letter?
- Do you need help preparing for an interview?
- Do you have the computer skills needed to complete online job applications?

Source: GAO interview with state officials and review of system documentation. [GAO-18-633]

DOL Has Not Systematically Collected Information on State Profiling Systems that Could Inform Its Oversight and Technical Assistance Efforts

Despite past research identifying weaknesses in state profiling systems, DOL has not systematically collected information on these systems, which limits its ability to oversee their performance. DOL officials said that they communicate with states about their profiling practices and gather some profiling system information in the course of their periodic UI and RESEA reviews.⁶⁷ However, DOL technical staff do not review or maintain this profiling system information for oversight purposes, and DOL does not have a systematic method of tracking state profiling practices across states. DOL officials said that they view their primary role, related to profiling systems, as providing technical assistance; however, by law, DOL is also responsible for ensuring that states' profiling systems meet federal requirements.⁶⁸ Further, GAO recommended in a 2007 report that DOL take a more active role in ensuring profiling system accuracy,⁶⁹ and federal internal control

⁶⁷According to officials, as part of on-site RESEA reviews, regional DOL staff discuss with state program staff whether their state's profiling system appears to be identifying the correct claimants, although DOL staff do not use specific criteria for determining whether a state's profiling system is performing well. DOL officials said that they may also gather some information on state systems through other means, including UI program reviews and reviews of quarterly regional paperwork and annual RESEA grant applications.

⁶⁸42 U.S.C. § 503(j).

⁶⁹Specifically, we recommended that DOL take a more active role to help ensure the accuracy of state profiling systems, for example, by tracking states' management of their systems and actively encouraging states that have not made recent efforts to review and update their systems to do so. DOL responded to this recommendation by publishing a study that included a list of best practices for improving state profiling systems. GAO, *Unemployment Insurance: More Guidance and Evaluation of Worker-Profiling Initiative Could Help Improve State Efforts*, [GAO-07-680](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 14, 2007).

standards state that agencies should obtain timely and relevant data to conduct effective monitoring.⁷⁰ Without such data, DOL's ability to effectively oversee state profiling practices is limited.

In addition, DOL provides technical assistance—which can range from answering specific questions to developing a new statistical profiling system on a state's behalf—to individual states only upon request, rather than identifying and providing assistance to states at higher risk of poor profiling system performance.⁷¹ This approach necessitates that states recognize when they need technical assistance and request it. However, states may not know that their profiling systems are performing poorly and may not request needed technical assistance as a result. For example, officials from four of our six selected states with statistical systems told us that they do not currently have a process to assess their systems' performance. As a result, these states may not be aware of potential issues they may need to address to improve their system performance. Additionally, officials responsible for maintaining another selected state's profiling system had incorrectly identified the system type. As a result, officials may have difficulty identifying problems and seeking support.

DOL has an opportunity to use its new UI state self-assessment to systematically collect information that could inform its oversight of state profiling practices and technical assistance efforts. This questionnaire, which DOL designed to help states self-identify and correct UI system weaknesses, covers 15 functional areas. Self-assessment questions in one of these areas will collect some information on state profiling systems, such as system type and date of last update. However, as currently designed, the self-assessment will not solicit other information that could help DOL identify states at risk of poor system performance. For example, it does not ask whether states have experienced challenges maintaining their systems (for instance, due to staff turnover), or how states have assessed system performance. DOL officials told us regional staff will review state responses to the self-assessment, the first of which are due in March 2019, and which will be one piece of information used to identify states that DOL might prioritize for general UI program oversight.

⁷⁰[GAO-14-704G](#).

⁷¹While DOL does provide some general resources, such as two trainings in the past three years, a DOL official said these trainings alone would not prepare some state officials to develop their own models; this is likely due to the different expertise levels of state officials responsible for these systems.

While DOL officials said it would make sense to use the information gathered to inform oversight of profiling systems as well, they did not have specific plans about how they would do so. Federal internal control standards state that agencies should identify, analyze, and respond to risks.⁷² Without collecting more detailed and consistent profiling system information and having a clearer plan for how to use it, DOL's ability to conduct effective monitoring and respond to risks will continue to be limited. More specifically, DOL may miss opportunities to help states at risk of poor profiling system performance better identify UI claimants most in need of reemployment services.

DOL Guidance Does Not Fully Address State Options for Meeting Profiling System Requirements

DOL's current profiling guidance does not clearly and comprehensively communicate the profiling system options available to states, which may prevent states from using the profiling systems that best suit their needs. While the law does not specify a particular type of profiling system states must use, DOL's only formal profiling guidance, issued in 1994, describes only two state options: statistical systems and characteristic screens, a type of non-statistical system. Further the guidance encourages states to use statistical systems, which it asserts are more efficient and precise, and easier to manage and adapt, than non-statistical systems.⁷³ DOL officials who provide technical assistance to states told us they also encourage all states to use statistical profiling systems for the same reasons. However, DOL officials acknowledged that, in practice, not all statistical profiling systems predict benefits exhaustion well, particularly outdated systems. The 2007 DOL-sponsored study similarly found that some state profiling systems did not predict benefit exhaustion much more accurately than random chance.⁷⁴

Additionally, statistical profiling systems may be more difficult for some states to develop and maintain than non-statistical systems. DOL officials acknowledged that states with technical capacity issues, such as staffing and data system limitations, may experience particular challenges. Officials we spoke to in four of our six selected states with statistical profiling systems told us that they have faced these challenges. In

⁷²[GAO-14-704G](#).

⁷³Department of Labor, *Unemployment Insurance Program Letter No. 41-94, Unemployment Insurance Program Requirements for the Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services System* (Washington D.C.: August 16, 1994).

⁷⁴Sullivan, Coffey, Kolovich, et al., *Worker Profiling*.

contrast, officials from all of our selected states with non-statistical profiling systems said their systems are easy to maintain. Officials from one state that uses a claimant needs assessment said this system also provides useful information that caseworkers can review prior to one-on-one meetings with claimants.

DOL officials told us they are supportive of state experimentation with alternative profiling approaches. However, officials in our selected states had differing perspectives on DOL's views on state flexibility and options for pursuing experimentation. For example, an official in one state was interested in making a change to the outcome variable that the state's statistical system predicted, believing it could reduce UI program expenditures.⁷⁵ As a result, the state consulted with regional DOL staff about the possible revision and made the change with DOL's support. In contrast, an official in another state who wanted to make a similar change to its statistical profiling system has not pursued the change or discussed it with DOL officials because he believes such a change would not be allowed.⁷⁶

Further, some of our selected states differed in their understanding of state flexibility to use the type of profiling system that works best for them. For example, officials in one of our selected states said they are switching to a statistical system after longstanding encouragement by DOL to do so, even though a key official expressed concern that a statistical system may not be useful, given the state's goal of providing services to all UI claimants.⁷⁷ In contrast, officials in another state said they had recently replaced their outdated statistical profiling system with a claimant needs

⁷⁵State officials said they were interested in changing their model to predict the proportion of total UI benefits a claimant would use, as opposed to the claimant's likelihood of exhausting benefits.

⁷⁶A state official said they would be interested in using their statistical profiling model to predict claimants' utilization of their UI benefits or the duration of their UI claim, rather than their likelihood of UI benefit exhaustion. The official explained that since some claimants may be eligible for only a short duration of UI benefits, targeting based on benefit exhaustion alone may not identify the claimants who are at risk of using the largest amount of UI benefits, and thus, focusing on the duration of UI benefits may be more useful in reducing UI trust fund expenditures.

⁷⁷According to officials, the state has a longstanding commitment to serving all UI claimants through its reemployment program, and the state's characteristic screen enables them to identify and exempt claimants who meet certain conditions, such as being only seasonally unemployed, from the state's reemployment service participation requirement.

assessment that differs from the options described in DOL's 1994 guidance, after requesting DOL review of their revised approach.⁷⁸

The differences in states' perspectives on allowable options for profiling systems may in part be due to the fact that DOL's current profiling guidance is limited and outdated. The guidance was issued in 1994, and it does not clearly reflect all of the options available to states, such as using a different outcome variable in a statistical system, or implementing an alternative type of non-statistical system to meet worker profiling requirements. Further, while a key DOL official said they are open to reviewing alternative state profiling approaches, they do not have a formal process for doing so, nor does guidance address the option for DOL to review alternative approaches. DOL officials said they believe the existing guidance provides states relatively wide latitude in designing their profiling systems and, as a result, they have not found the need to change those guidelines. However, federal internal control standards emphasize the importance of periodically reviewing policy for continued relevance and effectiveness in achieving objectives.⁷⁹ Without clearer, more current policy information from DOL on profiling requirements and available options, state officials may continue to have differing understandings of what they can do, and states may not pursue innovations that could improve their profiling systems, better suit their technical capacity, and, ultimately, better target claimants for reemployment services.

Conclusions

With 5.7 million UI claimants receiving nearly \$30 billion in unemployment benefits in 2017, reemployment services have the potential to substantially improve employment outcomes and conserve resources by shortening UI claimants' periods of unemployment. Earlier this year, Congress authorized up to approximately \$3.9 billion in funding over the next decade for the RESEA program, which states use to provide

⁷⁸By contrast, DOL officials said they became aware of the new approach after it was implemented. The 1994 guidance (UI Program Letter No. 41-94) lists two profiling system options for states to use: characteristic screens and statistical models. This state's claimant needs assessment assigns an individual score to each claimant's responses, producing a ranked list of claimants, and it does not fit the guidance's description of a characteristic screen, in which "no ranking is produced." The needs assessment also does not fit the guidance's description of a statistical model, in which a statistical process assigns weights to claimant characteristics.

⁷⁹[GAO-14-704G](#).

services to UI claimants most likely to exhaust their benefits. However, DOL has not taken key steps to help states effectively identify and select such claimants for the program. DOL has the opportunity to collect more systematic information on state practices for profiling UI claimants through its new UI state self-assessment, but the information it is planning to collect is limited and may not enable DOL to identify states that are having trouble identifying claimants in need of services. Further, DOL does not have a process for how it can use information on state risks of poor profiling system performance to guide its oversight and technical assistance efforts, choosing largely to assist individual states only when asked. Some states may not be equipped to identify weaknesses in their profiling systems, and as a result may not request the assistance they need. In addition, DOL encourages all states to use statistical profiling systems despite acknowledging that some states' statistical systems, particularly outdated ones, may not perform well in practice. Moreover, its profiling guidance to states has not been updated since 1994, and may not reflect the flexibility afforded states to pursue alternative profiling options. Without clearer, more current information from DOL, states may not pursue innovations that could help them better identify the UI claimants who need reemployment services most.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making the following three recommendations to the Department of Labor:

- The Secretary of Labor should systematically collect sufficient information on state profiling systems, possibly through DOL's new UI state self-assessment process, to identify states at risk of poor profiling system performance. For instance, DOL could collect information on challenges states have experienced using and maintaining their profiling systems, planned changes to the systems, or state processes for assessing the systems' performance. (Recommendation 1)
- The Secretary of Labor should develop a process to use information on state risks of poor profiling system performance to provide technical assistance to states that need to improve their systems. DOL may also wish to tailor its technical assistance based on state service delivery goals and technical capacity. (Recommendation 2)
- The Secretary of Labor should update agency guidance to ensure that it clearly informs states about the range of allowable profiling approaches. (Recommendation 3)

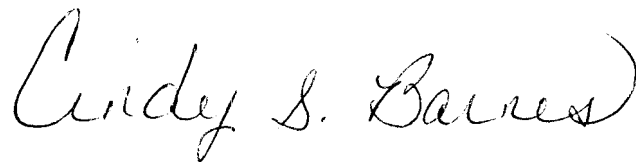
Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this product to the Department of Labor for comment. In its comments, reproduced in appendix II, DOL agreed with our recommendations and stated that it would take action to address them. DOL reiterated its commitment to providing technical assistance to states and strengthening the connection between the UI program and the public workforce system. DOL also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. Additionally, we provided relevant excerpts of the draft report to officials in the selected states we included in our review. We incorporated their technical comments as appropriate.

As agreed with your office, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of the Department of Labor, and other interested parties. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at 202-512-7215 or brownbarnesc@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.

Sincerely yours,

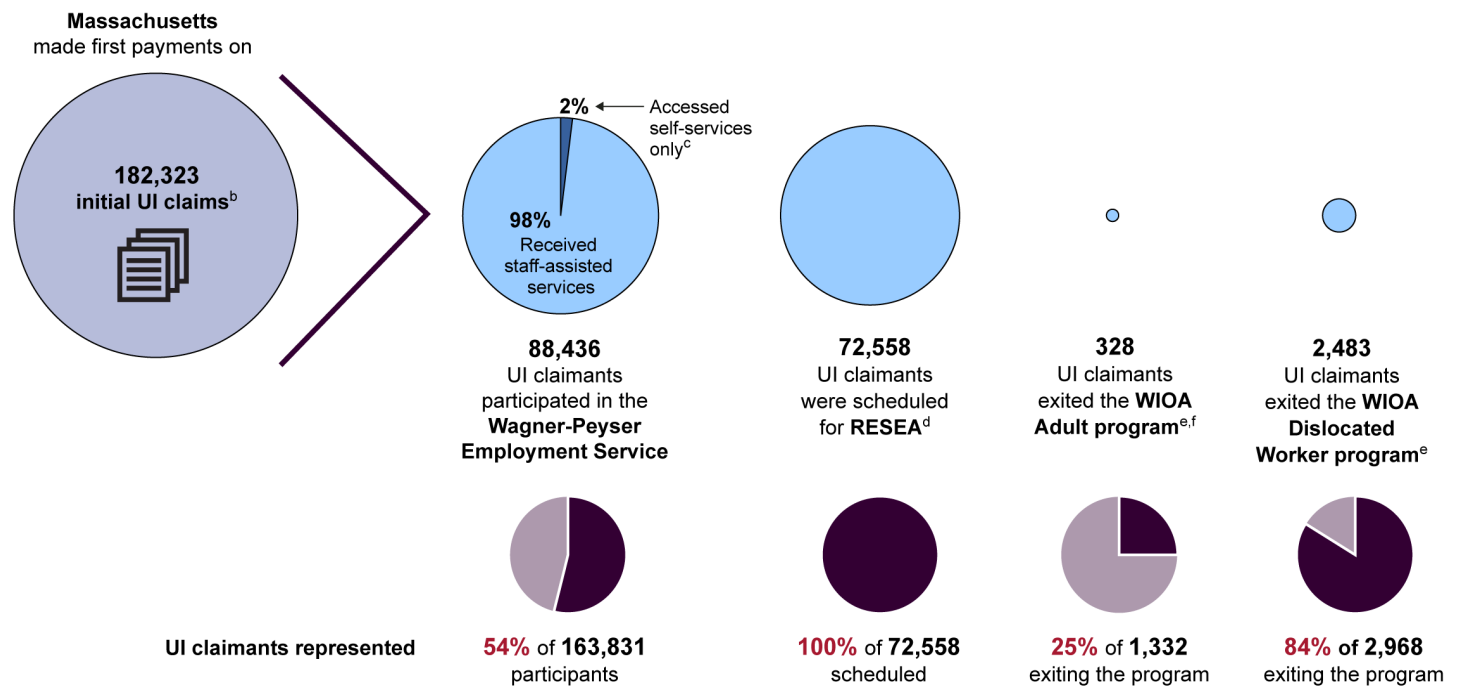


Cindy Brown Barnes
Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues

Appendix I: Selected State Program Participation Data

We selected six states—Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin—for in-depth review. These six selected states all served unemployment insurance (UI) claimants through several key federally funded workforce programs in program year 2015 (July 2015 through June 2016). For the five states that confirmed the reliability of the data they reported to the Department of Labor (DOL) over this time period, the numbers of UI claimants served through each program and percent of all service recipients who were UI claimants varied.¹ Summary data from each of these five states are presented in figures 9 through 13.

Figure 9: Massachusetts Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claims Paid and UI Claimants Receiving Services through Key Federally Funded Workforce Programs, Program Year 2015^a



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Labor (DOL) data. | GAO-18-633

^aProgram year 2015 runs from July 2015 through June 2016. UI claimants may be served by states through more than one listed program.

¹Officials from our sixth selected state, Nevada, reported that data system limitations prevented them from accurately identifying which program participants were UI claimants in some cases during this time period. As a result, we did not include Nevada in our selected state snapshots. Nevada officials reported these data system limitations have since been resolved.

**Appendix I: Selected State Program
Participation Data**

^bDOL officials said they use first payments to approximate the number of UI claimants in a year. However, an individual may have more than one period of employment and file more than one successful claim in a year. As a result, the number of first payments could be higher than the number of individual claimants in a given year.

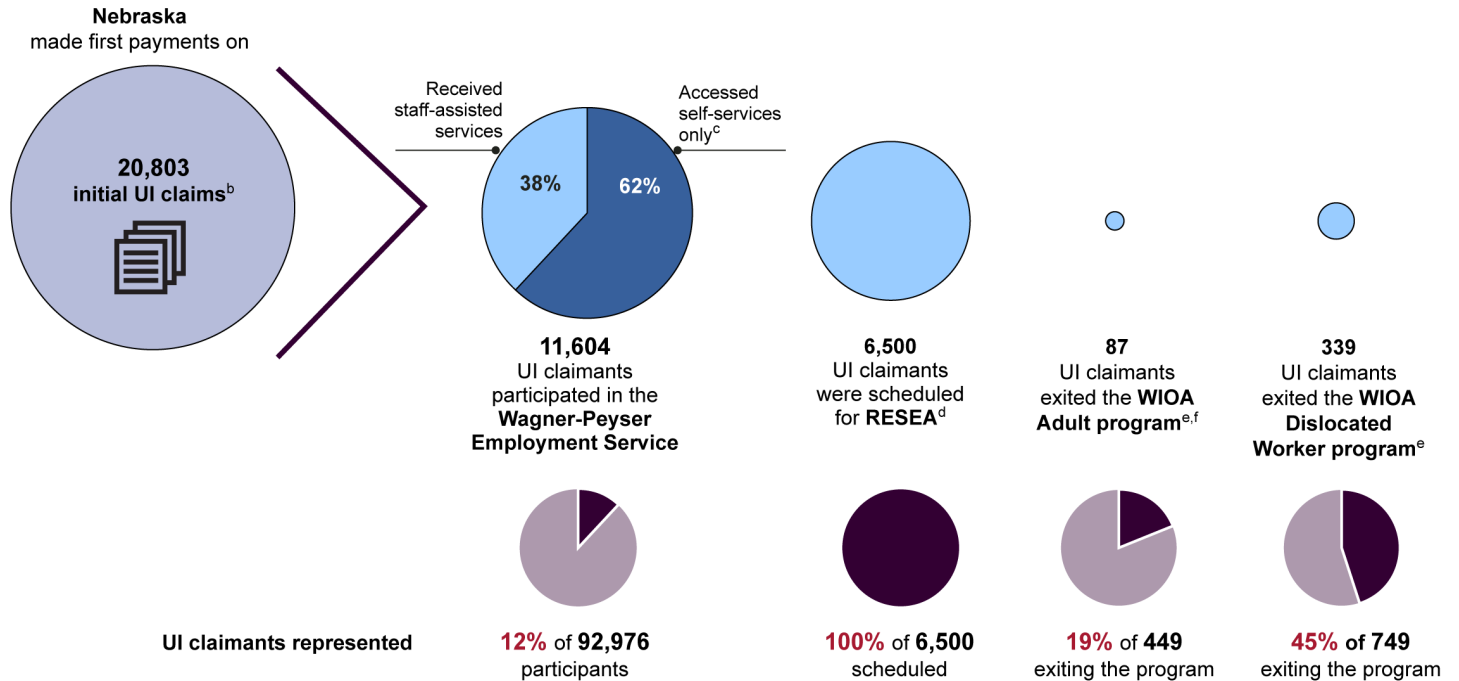
^cUnder Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) reporting guidelines in effect in program year 2015, self-service-only participation occurred when individuals served themselves by accessing services either in a physical location or remotely via the use of electronic technologies, with little to no staff involvement. Staff-assisted participation is characterized by significant staff involvement in service provision, including a staff member's assessment of a participant's skills, education, or career objectives. Under new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) reporting guidelines, individuals who access self-services only are excluded from the definition of a participant and are instead considered "reportable individuals." In Massachusetts, all UI claimants who meet screening criteria receive in-person reemployment services at a one-stop center. Massachusetts state officials also said that job bank users who did not access other services were not counted as participants or self-service recipients unless they clicked a button in the job bank to specify their interest in a job.

^dDOL data do not capture the unique number of UI claimants served through the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. As a result, DOL officials said the number of claimants scheduled to attend RESEA is the best available measure of service receipt.

^eProgram year 2015 data for the Adult program and Dislocated Worker program were reported by states under WIA performance measures. However, we refer to these as WIOA programs to reflect the fact that WIOA repealed WIA as of July 1, 2015. In addition, individuals are considered to have "exited" a WIA or WIOA program if they did not receive any services for at least 90 days and no future services are planned. . Since the date of program exit is not known until the participant has gone 90 days without receiving services, exit data are lagged one quarter. As a result, the exit data included in this report are tracked from April 2015 through March 2016.

^fAlthough states were permitted to count individuals who received self-services only as Adult program participants under WIA, they were removed from counts of individuals exiting the program to facilitate cross-state comparisons.

Figure 10: Nebraska Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claims Paid and UI Claimants Receiving Services through Key Federally Funded Workforce Programs, Program Year 2015^a



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Labor (DOL) data. | GAO-18-633

^aProgram year 2015 runs from July 2015 through June 2016. UI claimants may be served by states through more than one listed program.

^bDOL officials said they commonly use first payments to approximate the number of UI claimants in a year. However, an individual may have more than one period of employment and file more than one successful claim in a year. As a result, the number of first payments could be higher than the number of individual claimants in a given year.

^cUnder Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) reporting guidelines in effect in program year 2015, self-service-only participation occurred when individuals served themselves by accessing services either in a physical location or remotely via the use of electronic technologies, with little to no staff involvement. Staff-assisted participation is characterized by significant staff involvement in service provision, including a staff member’s assessment of a participant’s skills, education, or career objectives. Under new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) reporting guidelines, individuals who access self-services only are excluded from the definition of a participant and are instead considered “reportable individuals.” In Nebraska, all UI claimants, with certain exceptions, receive in-person reemployment services at a one-stop center. However, officials reported that Nebraska’s service model was fairly new in program year 2015 and said they believed the actual percent of UI claimants who received staff-assisted services was higher than the 38 percent reported. They attributed the possible underreporting to user error in properly reporting staff-assisted service receipt.

^dDOL data do not capture the unique number of UI claimants who received services through the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. As a result, DOL officials said the number of claimants scheduled to attend RESEA is the best available measure of service receipt.

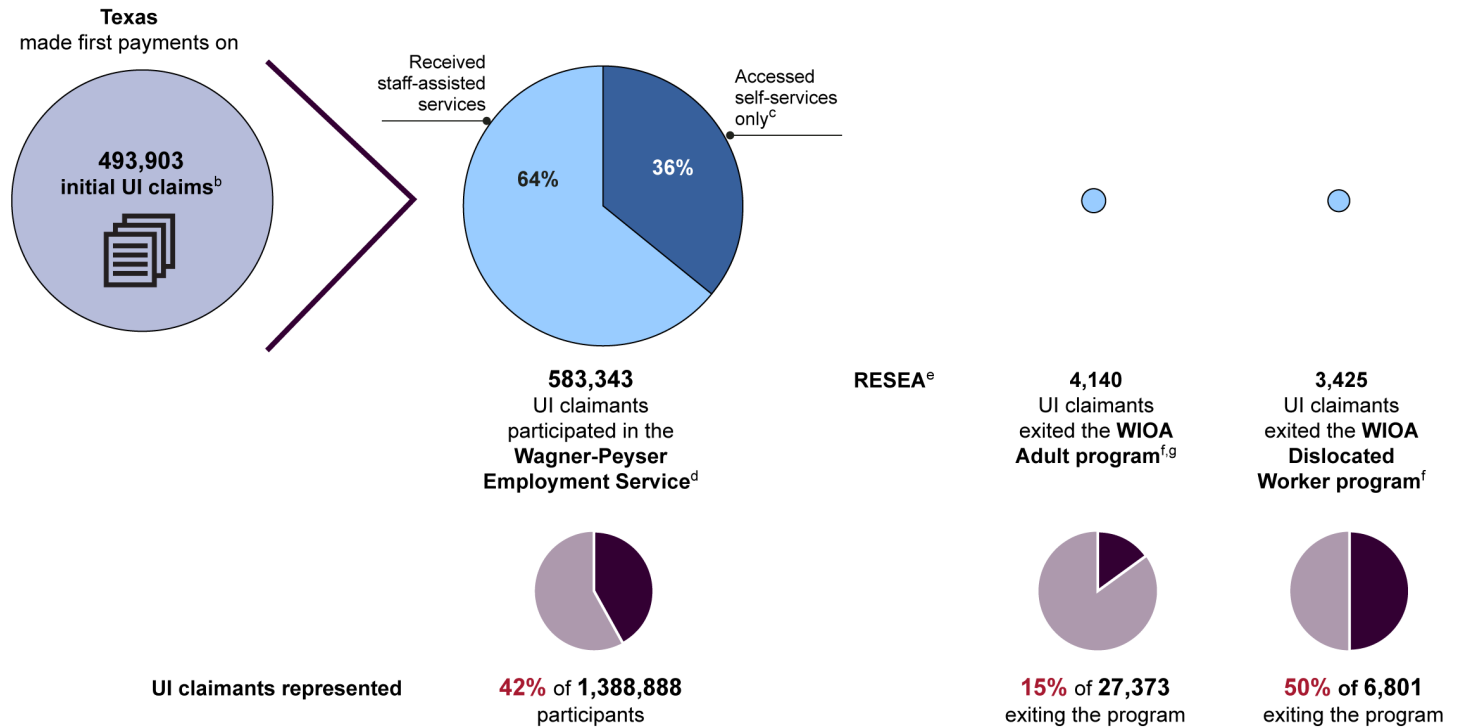
^eProgram year 2015 data for the Adult program and Dislocated Worker program were reported by states under WIA performance measures. However, we refer to these as WIOA programs to reflect the fact that WIOA repealed WIA as of July 1, 2015. In addition, individuals are considered to have “exited” a WIA or WIOA program if they did not receive any services for at least 90 days and no future

Appendix I: Selected State Program Participation Data

services are planned. Since the date of program exit is not known until the participant has gone 90 days without receiving services, exit data are lagged one quarter. As a result, the exit data included in this report are tracked from April 2015 through March 2016.

^fAlthough states were permitted to count individuals who received self-services only as Adult program participants under WIA, they were removed from counts of individuals exiting the program to facilitate cross-state comparisons.

Figure 11: Texas Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claims Paid and UI Claimants Receiving Services through Key Federally Funded Workforce Programs, Program Year 2015^a



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Labor (DOL) data. | GAO-18-633

^aProgram year 2015 runs from July 2015 through June 2016. UI claimants may be served by states through more than one of the federally funded workforce programs listed above.

^bDOL officials said they use first payments to approximate the number of UI claimants. However, an individual may have more than one period of employment and file more than one successful claim in a year. As a result, the number of first payments could be higher than the number of individual claimants in a given year.

^cUnder Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) reporting guidelines in effect in program year 2015, self-service-only participation occurred when individuals served themselves by accessing services either in a physical location or remotely via the use of electronic technologies, with little to no staff involvement. Staff-assisted participation is characterized by significant staff involvement in service provision, including a staff member's assessment of a participant's skills, education, or career objectives. Under new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) reporting guidelines, individuals who access self-services only are excluded from the definition of a participant and are instead considered "reportable individuals."

**Appendix I: Selected State Program
Participation Data**

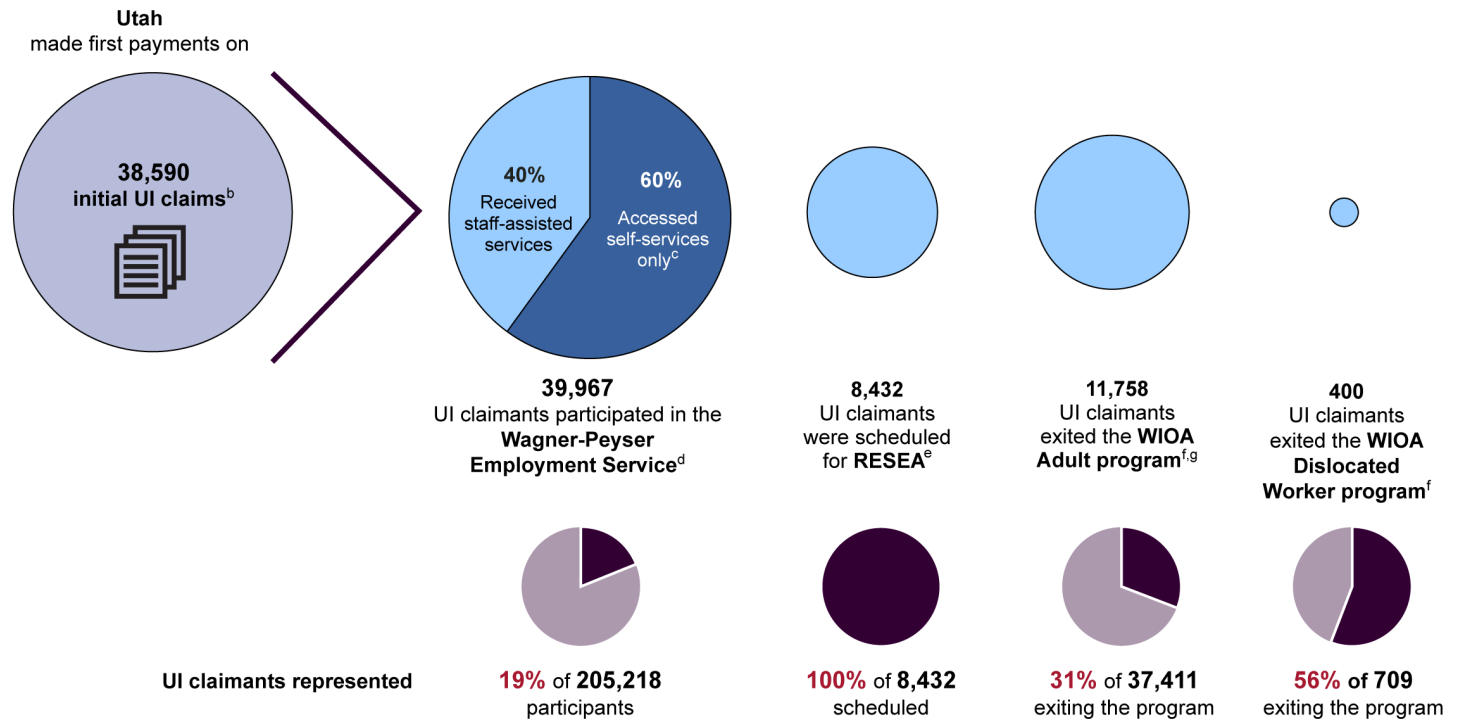
^dA larger number of UI claimants participated in the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service than the number of new claims paid in Texas over this time period. When asked, DOL officials gave several reasons why a state may report more claimants participating in the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service than new claims paid. First, they said that many states require registration with the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service as part of the initial application process for UI and many UI registrants identify themselves as UI claimants when they register, but never receive a first payment because they are found to be ineligible or return to work. Second, they said that a participant is considered to have finished participation after 90 days with no service receipt; if the participant subsequently receives services again, the participant would be counted twice. Finally, they said that an individual who files a UI claim in one state can participate in another state's Wagner-Peyser Employment Service.

^eTexas did not participate in the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) grant program during the time period under review.

^fProgram year 2015 data for the Adult program and Dislocated Worker program were reported by states under WIA performance measures. However, we refer to these as WIOA programs to reflect the fact that WIOA repealed WIA as of July 1, 2015. In addition, individuals are considered to have "exited" a WIA or WIOA program if they did not receive any services for at least 90 days and no future services are planned. Since the date of program exit is not known until the participant has gone 90 days without receiving services, exit data are lagged one quarter. As a result, the exit data included in this report are tracked from April 2015 through March 2016.

^gAlthough states were permitted to count individuals who accessed self-services only as Adult program participants under WIA, such individuals were removed from counts of participants exiting the program to facilitate cross-state comparisons.

Figure 12: Utah Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claims Paid and UI Claimants Receiving Services through Key Federally Funded Workforce Programs, Program Year 2015^a



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Labor (DOL) data. | GAO-18-633

^aProgram year 2015 runs from July 2015 through June 2016. UI claimants may be served by states through more than one of the federally funded workforce programs listed program above.

^bDOL officials said they use first payments to approximate the number of UI claimants. However, an individual may have more than one period of employment and file more than one successful claim in a year. As a result, the number of first payments could be higher than the number of individual claimants in a given year.

^cUnder Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) reporting guidelines in effect in program year 2015, self-service-only participation occurred when individuals served themselves by accessing services either in a physical location or remotely via the use of electronic technologies, with little to no staff involvement. Staff-assisted participation is characterized by significant staff involvement in service provision, including a staff member's assessment of a participant's skills, education, or career objectives. Under new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) reporting guidelines, individuals who access self-services only are excluded from the definition of a participant and are instead considered "reportable individuals."

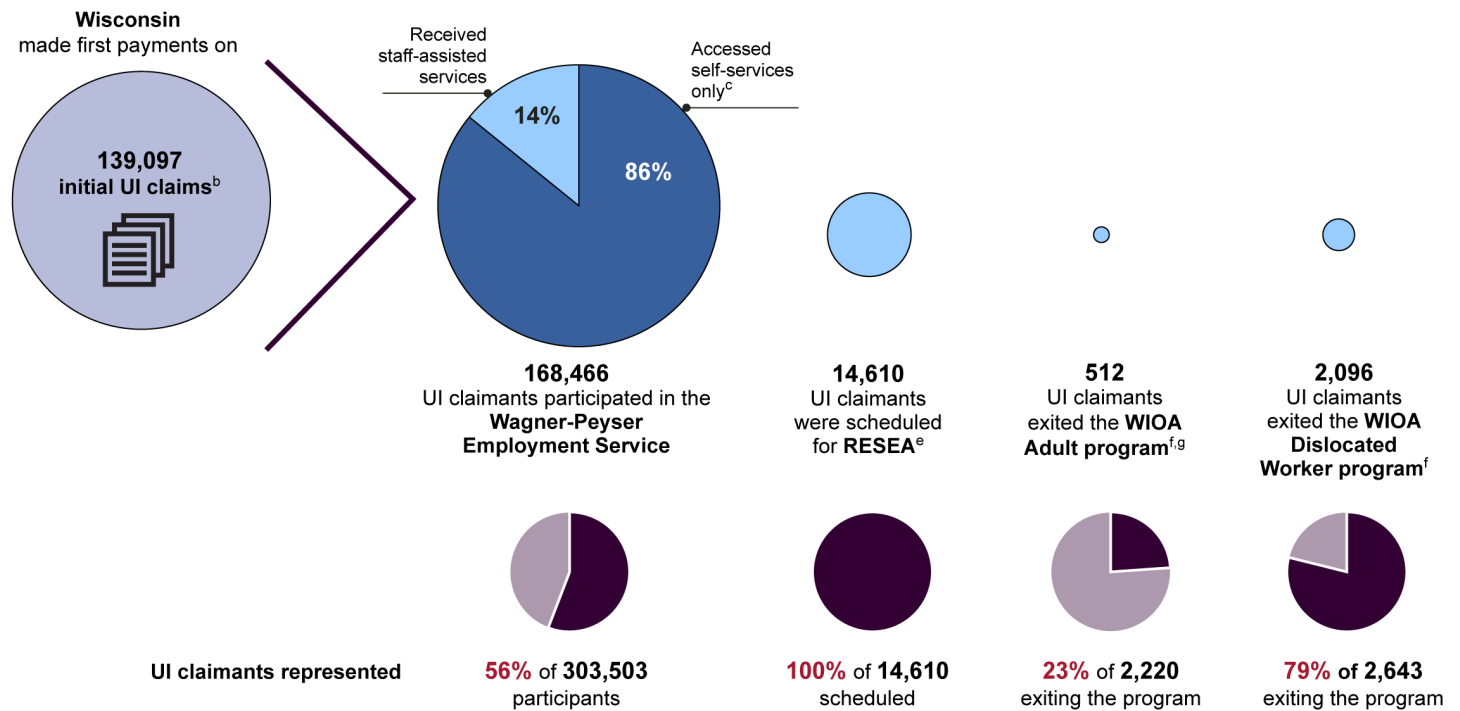
^dA larger number of UI claimants participated in the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service than the number of new claims paid in Utah over this time period. When asked, DOL officials gave several reasons why a state may report more claimants participating in the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service than new claims paid. First, they said that many states require registration with the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service as part of the initial application process for UI and many UI registrants identify themselves as UI claimants when they register, but never receive a first payment because they are found to be ineligible or return to work. Second, they said that a participant is considered to have finished participation after 90 days with no service receipt; if the participant subsequently receives services again, the participant would be counted twice. Finally, they said that an individual who files a UI claim in one state can participate in another state's Wagner-Peyser Employment Service.

^eDOL data do not capture the unique number of UI claimants who received services through the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. As a result, DOL officials said the number of claimants scheduled to attend RESEA is the best available measure of service receipt.

^fProgram year 2015 data for the Adult program and Dislocated Worker program were reported by states under WIA performance measures. However, we refer to these as WIOA programs to reflect the fact that WIOA repealed WIA as of July 1, 2015. In addition, individuals are considered to have “exited” a WIA or WIOA program if they did not receive any services for at least 90 days and no future services are planned. Since the date of program exit is not known until the participant has gone 90 days without receiving services, exit data are lagged one quarter. As a result, the exit data included in this report are tracked from April 2015 through March 2016.

^gAlthough states were permitted to count individuals who received self-services only as Adult program participants under WIA, they were removed from counts of participants exiting the program to facilitate cross-state comparisons.

Figure 13: Wisconsin Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claims Paid and UI Claimants Receiving Services through Key Federally Funded Workforce Programs, Program Year 2015^a



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Labor (DOL) data. | GAO-18-633

^aProgram year 2015 runs from July 2015 through June 2016. UI claimants may be served by states through more than one of the federally funded workforce programs listed above.

^bDOL officials said they commonly use first payments to approximate the number of UI claimants. However, an individual may have more than one period of employment and file more than one successful claim in a year. As a result, the number of first payments could be higher than the number of individual claimants in a given year.

^cUnder Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) reporting guidelines in effect in program year 2015, self-service-only participation occurred when individuals served themselves by accessing services either in a physical location or remotely via the use of electronic technologies, with little to no staff

**Appendix I: Selected State Program
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involvement. Staff-assisted participation is characterized by significant staff involvement in service provision, including a staff member's assessment of a participant's skills, education, or career objectives. Under new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) reporting guidelines, individuals who access self-services only are excluded from the definition of a participant and are instead considered "reportable individuals."

^dA larger number of UI claimants participated in the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service than the number of new claims paid in Wisconsin over this time period. When asked, DOL officials gave several reasons why a state may report more claimants participating in the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service than claims paid. First, they said that many states require registration with the Wagner-Peyser Employment Service as part of the initial application process for UI and many UI registrants identify themselves as UI claimants when they register, but never receive a first payment because they are found to be ineligible or return to work. Second, they said that a participant is considered to have finished participation after 90 days with no service receipt; if the participant subsequently receives services again, the participant would be counted twice. Finally, they said that an individual who files a UI claim in one state can participate in another state's Wagner-Peyser Employment Service.

^eDOL data do not capture the unique number of UI claimants who received services through the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. As a result, DOL officials said the number of claimants scheduled to attend RESEA is the best available measure of service receipt.

^fProgram year 2015 data for the Adult program and Dislocated Worker program were reported by states under WIA performance measures. However, we refer to these as WIOA programs to reflect the fact that WIOA repealed WIA as of July 1, 2015. In addition, individuals are considered to have "exited" a WIA or WIOA program if they did not receive any services for at least 90 days and no future services are planned. Since the date of program exit is not known until the participant has gone 90 days without receiving services, exit data are lagged one quarter. As a result, exit data included in this report are tracked from April 2015 through March 2016.

^gAlthough states were permitted to count individuals who received self-services only as Adult program participants under WIA, they were removed from counts of participants exiting the program to facilitate cross-state comparisons.

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Labor

U.S. Department of Labor

Employment and Training Administration
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20210



AUG - 9 2018

Cindy S. Brown-Barnes
Director
Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G. Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Ms. Brown-Barnes:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) draft report, "Reemployment Services: DOL Could Better Support States in Targeting Unemployment Insurance Claimants for Services (GAO-18-633)."

The Department appreciates GAO's efforts to describe Federal efforts to assist states with providing reemployment services to Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants. We work closely with states to provide robust monitoring and technical assistance, while providing states with the flexibility to administer their programs to meet their needs. Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, we work with states to strengthen connections between the UI system and workforce development programs and to improve service delivery at American Job Centers and remotely for UI claimants. In addition, in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (Public Law 115-123), Congress authorized a Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments grant program that the Department is currently implementing.

The Department agrees with GAO's recommendations. Following the release of GAO's final report, the Employment and Training Administration will begin implementation of the recommendations.

Thank you for your review and recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rosemary Lahasky".

Rosemary Lahasky
Deputy Assistant Secretary

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Cindy Brown Barnes, (202) 512-7215, brownbarnesc@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Rebecca Woiwode (Assistant Director), Ellen Phelps Ranen (Analyst-In-Charge), Caitlin Croake, Margaret Hettinger, Efrain Magallan, and Amrita Sen made key contributions to this report. Also contributing to this report were Lilia Chaidez, Alex Galuten, Thomas James, Nicole Jarvis, Serena Lo, Mimi Nguyen, Jessica Orr, Karissa Robie, Almeta Spencer, and Jeff Tessin.

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