



BELIZE PRESS OFFICE

• Phone: 822-0094 or 0092

• Fax: 822-2671

• website: www.belize.gov.bz

PRESS RELEASE

Update on Unemployment Relief Program

Belmopan. September 3, 2020. 6:30 p.m.

Phase 2 of the Covid-19 Unemployment Relief Program opened for applications on August 3, 2020. The total number of applications received as of this morning, September 3rd, is 61,395.

Some improvements have been introduced in the application process in an effort to reduce errors. These include:

1. Immediate checks against Social Security Board (SSB) data to ensure that an applicant's name, Social Security Number (SSN) and date of birth matches with the information in the SSB system so as to ensure that incorrect SSNs cannot be entered and double applications in the same name are not possible;
2. Provision of guidance in entering banking information in order to reduce errors; and
3. Guidance in identifying and inserting employers' names.

In Phase 2, the National Bank of Belize has replaced the Social Security Board as the paying agent. Payment is now being made directly from bank to bank. This makes the payment process quicker and difficulties easier to resolve and removes the burden from SSB so they can return to their substantive work.

A unit within the Labour Department is processing the applications in Phase 2. In Phase 1, a small group of public officers had been selected and assisted tremendously. This was possible, at that time, because it was during the period of the COVID-19 lockdown and these persons worked from home. They are

now back at their substantive posts, so a new set of arrangements needed to be made and personnel had to be trained.

The Government of Belize's Covid19.bz website has been updated with the ability to check on the status of an application. This facility can be found at <https://payment.covid19.gov.bz/paymentstatus>. Applicants are invited to use this facility to check the status of their application at any time.

Of the total applications received, 8,144 applications have been rejected where applicants:

1. Are BOOST recipients;
2. Receive Government or Social Security Pension;
3. Applied as "long term unemployed" in Phase 1 – that category is not available in phase 2;
4. Are below the age of 18; or
5. Appear in Social Security Board records as deceased persons.

Applicants who are informed that they have been excluded for any of these reasons, and feel that this should not have been done, may provide additional information by sending an email to unemployment@covid19.bz so that the application can be reviewed.

Almost 10,000 applicants submitted applications with incomplete information, such as missing banking information. These applicants have been notified and were given the opportunity to review and correct their applications. Many have already done so and 5,913 remain to be corrected. This number is decreasing daily.

Review of applications started on August 18th. This started slowly because the review team was in training. In the first week, only 1,489 applications were approved. In the second week ending September 2nd, 5,929 applications were approved. Approvals will continue to accelerate over the days ahead.

As of this morning, 7,418 applications have been approved. Of these, 6,621 payments have been processed by the National Bank. The Central Bank closed the automatic payment system on September 2nd as a part of the emergency preparation for Tropical Storm Nana. As soon as the system is re-opened payments will resume.

Payments are normally credited to applicants' bank accounts on the same day the payment instructions are sent to National Bank. In the case of credit unions, payments are sent to the credit union on the same day, but it may take a few working days for the credit unions to manually post the deposit to their

members' accounts. In the case of TopUp prepaid cards, it can take three to four working days to prepare the Top UP cards and then to credit the payments to the card. There is an additional three to four working days for the card to be ready for delivery at the location nearest to the applicant.

Delivery of TopUp cards will be done through the Labour Department offices across the country. Approved applicants will be notified when the card has been prepared by Heritage Bank and will also be notified when it reaches the Labour Department office that is in the district in which the applicant lives – as per address provided at application. Recipients of Top Up cards are reminded that they will need to present a valid identification card in order to collect their card. They will also need to use the same telephone number they provided on their application to text Heritage Bank and receive their PIN to activate their TopUp card.

Ends