Montana Department of LABOR & INDUSTRY 2024

Accomplishments & Efficiencies

SUPPORTING THE MONTANA ECONOMY

Montana continues to build upon the historic employment growth in 2021-2022 to now boast a record high of over 563,000 employed Montanans as of October 2024. Montana's fast employment growth since 2020 is one of the strongest post-covid recoveries in the nation, ranking 8th among states.

Growing Montana's Labor Force

• With low unemployment remaining a challenge for Montana businesses seeking qualified employees, a growing labor force is helping businesses by reducing pressure created by labor shortages. The Montana labor force reached a record high of over 580,000 people in 2024 after adding over 10,000 workers in 2023.

Achieving Real Wage Growth

• Strong growth in high-paying jobs and competition resulting from low unemployment pushed the average wage earned by Montana workers to $57,230 in 2023. This fast growth in earnings has helped Montana workers amidst persistent inflation, with Montana being one of only two states with positive real wage growth since 2020.

Operational Efficiencies

• Despite a strong labor market, Montana still faces job losses with the closures of Pyramid Mountain Lumber, the Roseburg particle board plan, and the reduction of operations at Sibanye-Stillwater. DLI has coordinated a fast response to get affected workers access to services and resources geared towards reemployment. In the process, DLI has obtained nearly $2 million for retraining workers affected by the Pyramid and Roseburg closures, and applied for $11.5 million more to assist workers affected by the Sibanye-Stillwater layoffs.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE DIVISION

Montana's Unemployment Insurance Division (UID) administers the state's unemployment insurance program, which provides temporary, partial wage replacement benefits for unemployed workers which in turn provides economic stabilization to our communities. The Division's Claims Processing Bureau conducts the intake, adjudication, and payment of UI benefit claims. The Bureau assists unemployed Montanans with claims filings and appeals and operates claims processing centers in Helena and Billings.

Strategic Goal #1: Enhance Claims Processing

- MUSE – stabilization & performance enhancement.
  - Improved claimant and employer insight into claim status.
  - Enhanced security function workflow.
  - Streamlined processes between Claims Processing & Tax.
  - Collaborate with ITSD to improve Document & Imaging with less manual intervention.
- Positive public feedback on MUSE surveys and websites – Average of 4.4 out of 5 stars for ease of use.
- 51% of claimants are using a mobile device to complete weekly payment requests. Taking less than 3.5 minutes to complete.
- 88.5% of claimants are completing information requests electronically.

Strategic Goal #2: Access

- Phone logistics – created model to hire temporary employees for phone support during peak winter workload. Allows for commensurate staffing levels during busy season, while not carrying unnecessary FTE.
- Expanding client access by adding WSD and UI staff to the Walt Sullivan lobby. Clients now have a live agent available to connect clients with a UI claims team while providing access to WSD programs simultaneously.
- Leverage Five9 telecom software: predictive modeling to strategically apply resources when weekly demand is highest. Better data to improve call handling time; reason tabs to research which calls take the longest and why.

Strategic Goal #3: Unified Program Access

- Rapid Response – 11 Rapid Response events in 2024. Working as a unified MTDLI team, aided laid off workers on sites across the state with UI assistance, training opportunities, resume assistance, and many other services.
- Re-Employment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) offers vital reemployment services, job training programs, and other services. Collaborated with WSD and their new system to streamline RESEA processes with the goal of reducing UI benefit weeks and return people to the workforce faster.

Strategic Goal #4: Leverage Partnerships

- Kicked off our 1-year collaboration with Public Consulting Group in 2024.
- Continue to foster new relationships and work with other states who use the FAST core product in their UI programs to enhance performance and learn best practices.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS DIVISION

The Department's Employment Standards Division (ESD) is responsible for a wide range of services that seek to protect Montana workers and consumers. The Professional Licensing Bureau provides operational and administrative support for Montana's professional licensing boards, and operates the state's Prescription Drug Registry. The Building and Commercial Measurements Bureau sets and enforces minimum standards for building, electrical, plumbing, and elevator. ESD also licenses, tests, and certifies all weighting and measurement devices used in commercial transactions.

Strategic Goal #1: Improve Licensing Efficiency/Increase Capacity

- Time to issue license/renewal – reduced by 10%.
    - Time to Issuance – in CY 24, the Department averages 45 days from application to issuance of a license across all licensing boards and programs.
        - Time to licensure is applicant, requirement, and process dependent, with many applications requiring background checks and verifications.
        - Additionally, licensure is heavily dependent on active participation. Completed dormant applications (200+ days) are attributable to uninvolved applicants.
- First time approval – increase time approvals to 95%.
    - Enhancing branching logic in online platform to ensure applications, when submitted, are as complete as possible.
- Increase automation rate – increase automation of licensing process steps to 90%.
    - Automated FROI reporting through Service Now.
    - Licensing is in the process of automating applications for Independent Contractor/Contractor Registration/Home Inspector applications will go-live in Q1 of 2025.
- Compliance rate – increase percentage of licensees that comply with regulations upon audit by 10%.

Strategic Goal #2: Digitize and Optimize Online Service Platform

- Usage rate – increase usage rate of digitized platform to 90%.
    - The Dispute Resolution Section (DRS) has increased the usage rate for its forms to an estimated 90% in 2024.
    - Online usage for licensing renewals is currently 95%. For all transactions at 86%.
- Transition all applications to Accela platform.
    - EStop is a large group of applications transitioned to Accela.
    - All dispute resolution forms are migrated to Accela.
    - Wage and Hour has enabled online platform to allow for digital communication with interested parties.

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- Adopt virtual interaction platforms.
    - Implementing GQ Inspection Manager – to enhance online scheduling and communication inspection results with customers.
    - Implemented VuSpex for virtual inspection which is leveraged to perform virtual compliance inspections tied to licensing and renewal of certain licenses.
    - On-going work to implement remote meeting capabilities through existing software for customers to talk with licensing staff.

Strategic Goal #3: Enhance Stakeholder Agreement

- Feedback and Satisfaction Scores – collect and achieve 80% or higher on satisfaction scores.
    - Implemented an online complaint process through Accela and CLIO.
    - Feedback and satisfaction scores from the Annual Arbitration and Labor Relations Conference in 2024 reflect a 93% satisfaction rate with this educational offering.
    - Feedback from Educational Outreach for Board Members reflects a 98% satisfaction rate.
- Audience Reach and Penetration – increase number of individuals or communities reached by outreach efforts.
    - Continue to show increased participation in the Governor's Conference on Workers' Compensation.
    - Reinvigorating SafetyFest, committing to one virtual and one in-person event per year.
    - Added an additional education opportunity in Eastern Montana for Building Codes.
    - Conducted numerous trainings around the state – topics include Interest Based Bargaining, Labor Management Committee, Collective Bargaining, Uninsured Employer Education, and Worker's Compensation.
- Conversion Rates – follow-up audits/surveys indicate 80% retention of educational objectives.
- Completion Rates – attain 50% or higher participation rates for intended audiences.

TECHNOLOGY SERVICES DIVISION

The goal of the Technology Services Division is to support the development and maintenance of the Department's IT systems to ensure usability, reliability and security for employees and customers. The Montana Department of Labor & Industry (DLI) has created a centralized organizational structure for IT that focuses on efficiencies and service, while reducing duplicative costs and improving coordination across the entire Department and the Enterprise.

- Offers DLI a better mechanism to recruit and train skilled staff to support DLI systems and be more resilient to changing needs, priorities, and staffing levels.
- Implemented IT Asset Management processes and procedures for managing Device and Software licenses, reducing waste, overage, and risk to DLI.

Strategic Goal #1: Support for Work Force Development

- Deployed WSD Case Management System (replacing MWORKS).
  - Provides a new modern system for end users.
  - Offers better quality data for reporting and to engage clients.
  - Increased efficiency gains with fewer clicks to operate the system, more functions, and opportunities to track services, and better mechanisms to engage with customers.
- Started new Work Opportunity Tax Credit System build (August 2024) to go live in May 2025, replacing manual processes for processing and tracking WOTC Applications.
- Started development of External Client Portal for WSD. This will provide an online mechanism for businesses, employers, WOTC customers, Job Seekers, people looking to upskill, to self-serve online, and engage with WSD for support and services.

Strategic Goal #2: Support for Employment Standards Division

- Moved the Accela Business Licensing and Permitting platform to be cloud hosted.
- Currently engaged in an e-Stop development effort, putting the legacy DOR e-Stop application in the Accela Platform.
  - This will leverage the existing DLI Accela instance, support, and expertise to build and maintain this multi-agency portal.
- Working to partner with the Department of Agriculture to develop a new licensing process to track licensing and education for Pesticide Licensing in the Accela Platform.
  - The existing DLI Accela instance, support, and expertise to build and maintain this other agency portal.
  - Replace an aging legacy system that is complex and lacks sufficient support.
  - The first of several license opportunities from AG that migrate to a single Accela platform.
- Continuing to migrate legacy ESD applications to the Accela Platform.
  - Allowing more of ESD systems and data into one platform for more efficient data sharing and better support cross-functional processes within ESD.

MUSE

Strategic Goal #1: Public Facing MUSE

• New Features and screens for claimants to view the status of their claim and any associated benefit issues (Claim Status Tracker, Benefits History Control).
• Running duplicate check logic for claimants reporting laid off issues inaccurately for the same employer, which will reduce repetitive and confusing employer information requests.
• Improvements for employers to limit which of their authorized web profiles receive notifications about information requests.
• Web message improvements:
    ▪ Added informational descriptions and links to claimant handbook for self-service.
    ▪ Email confirming DLI has received the message.
    ▪ Directly link web message to benefit issue in question for internal adjudicators.
• Okta – seasonal claimants do not have to go through the registration process again.
• Expanded capabilities – 51% of claimants are using a mobile device to complete weekly payment requests. Taking less than 3.5 minutes to complete.
• 88.5% of claimants are completing information requests electronically.
• Performance Stats – 99% of system response time is less than 1 second.

Strategic Goal #2: Internal MUSE

• Automated the processing of claim reviews, reducing a significant number of claims that would previously pend for manual review.
• Job Attachment – questions up front on the initial claim instead of a separate information request.
• An estimated monetary will only get finalized once the claimant passes ID Verification allowing 21 days for adjudication of claim-sourced issues.
• FIVS (FAST Identity Verification Services).
    ▪ No longer send submissions to FIVS if claimant hasn't updated a meaningful attribute. Ex. updated address but receive payments through ACH.
    ▪ Sending outcome feedback and additional information to FIVS.
• Claims pending initial ID verification are pulled from employee work queues until cleared. Subsequent ID verifications allows employees to continue work so the claim is ready to process after verification.
• Improved system-adjudication: Reduce the number of issues that need to have a user review them if the system has all the information necessary for determination.
• Auto discarding of certain benefit issues from associated issues that are adjudicated. Ex. if someone is determined to be Job Attached associated Work Search issues are discarded.

WORKFORCE SERVICES DIVISION

The Workforce Services Division (WSD) is charged with three primary goals to ensure that workforce development in Montana remains strong and growing. 1) Montana employers understand the labor market and have a skilled and ready workforce that meets their needs, today and tomorrow. 2) Montana workers understand the job market and have access to skills development opportunities and job search assistance services. 3) Business, job seekers, educators, students, workforce and economic development partners, and the general public all have a place to go to learn about the workforce and a way to connect with each other to keep it growing.

Strategic Goal #1: Supporting Montana Workers

- In 2023, employment and training programs overseen by WSD served thousands of Montanans through a variety of training program models. Highlights for 2023 participation include:
    - Over 6,200 Montana businesses were assisted with workforce recruitment, upskilling, and certification for valuable tax credits. Our Job Service and Business Engagement teams tend to assist smaller businesses who may not have the resources to have HR departments.
    - Roughly 20,200 Montana workers were assisted in one of our workforce programs. Over 80,000 Montanans used our career planning resources.
        - Of the 20,200, roughly 15,000 were served by Job Service and private providers to receive career and reemployment assistance ranging from resume assistance to paying for tuition.
- WSD coordinated rapid response services for employees of major layoffs in 2024, including the Sibanye-Stillwater Mine, Pyramid Mountain Lumber Mill, Roseburg particle board plant, and Mann Mortgage.
    - Over 1,000 employees affected by the layoffs were offered rapid response services including assistance filing UI claims, connections to services available from state and local partners, referrals to training programs, and job search assistance such as help with resumes and connections to hiring employers.
    - WSD applied for and has received nearly $2 million to assist workers affected by the Timber layoffs.
        - WSD has enrolled 18 workers affected by the Timber layoffs to receive retraining and reemployment assistance.
    - WSD has applied for approximately $11.5 million to provide services to the workers affected by the Sibanye-Stillwater mine layoffs.

Strategic Goal #2: Upskill and Training

- WSD provided funding to train and upskill over 1,500 workers who received financial assistance for training or work-related expenses that they needed to obtain better jobs.
    - Over 1,000 individuals were enrolled in WIOA training programs.
        - Job placement for Adult and Dislocated programs was 66% - 70% in SFY2024.
        - Median quarterly earnings for completers were over $8,000 for the Adult program and over $9,000 for Dislocated Worker. (Dislocated workers tend to have more work experi ence than adult participants; adult participants are typically law income)
        - Participants in WIOA trainings had over $1.75 million invested directly towards their career goals.
- The ARPA funded Rapid Retraining training program assisted 550 individuals through short-term training geared towards quick reemployment into high quality jobs .
    - Over $800,000 was directly invested into skills upgrades and career progression for these individuals.
- Montana's Registered Apprenticeship Program continued record participation by both sponsors and apprentices in FY2024 .
    - Over 700 business sponsors and 3,300 apprentices were active in the program.
- The Incumbent Worker Training program provided 103 businesses with support to provide further training to 282 workers.
- To help Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants quickly return to work, nearly 2,300 UI claimants at the highest risk of UI benefit exhaustion were provided reemployment services in 2023 under the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program.
- Jobs for Montana Graduates (JMG) provided career training to over 1,300 high school students across 34 high schools, 19 middle schools, two colleges, and through the WIOA program.
- Nearly 1,400 veterans received career and employment services at Job Service Offices.
- Over 14,000 jobs paying over $50,000 were added to the state's economy during FY2024.

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