



COVID-19 Impact on Nebraska Unemployment Insurance Claims **March 2020 to March 2021**

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NEBRASKA

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DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

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Introduction

Across the country, unemployment claims reached record levels due to COVID-19. Nebraska's peak in new claims came the first week of April 2020 (26,228) and the peak of continued claims (106,758) followed just a few weeks later. For comparison, during the same weeks in 2019, there were 584 initial claims and 3,106 continued weeks claimed, equating to a 4,391% and 3,337% increase respectively. Since the peak, unemployment insurance claims decreased sharply, but were around 50% higher than 2019 levels for initial claims and 86% above 2019 for continued claims. (2)

The demographics of claimants during the period from March 2020 to March 2021 were, for the most part, consistent with the overall demographics of the population of Nebraska. However, claims filed by workers who identified their race as black or African American rose disproportionately, and women filed a higher share of claims than is typical. Demographic data is self reported.

The industries with the highest initial claims from March 2020 to March 2021 were accommodation and food services (36,653), health care and social assistance (28,012), and retail trade (26,478). The occupations with the most continued weeks claimed were waiters and waitresses (81,248), cashiers (63,836), and customer service representatives (53,483). (3)

With the passage of the CARES Act, and subsequently the Continued Assistance Act (CAA), Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) benefits became available to individuals who are not typically eligible for unemployment insurance benefits, such as the self-employed, independent contractors, and gig workers. Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation program (PEUC), created an extension of regular state unemployment insurance benefits, and Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) provided an additional \$600 to all claimants receiving state or federal benefits. This amount was reduced to \$300 with the passage of the American Rescue Plan Act in March of 2021. The FEMA Lost Wages Assistance Program (LWA) applied to those who were unemployed due to COVID-19 and eligible for a weekly benefit amount of at least \$100 before taxes for weeks ending August 1–September 5.

In addition to these federal programs, the Extended Benefits (EB) program triggered on in mid-June, 2020, based on the state's insured unemployment rate. The program provided an additional 13 weeks of benefits for claimants who had exhausted their regular UI eligibility. EB triggered off September 12, 2020.

Some common unemployment terms mentioned in this report are **Initial Claims, Continued Weeks Claimed, and Weeks Paid.**

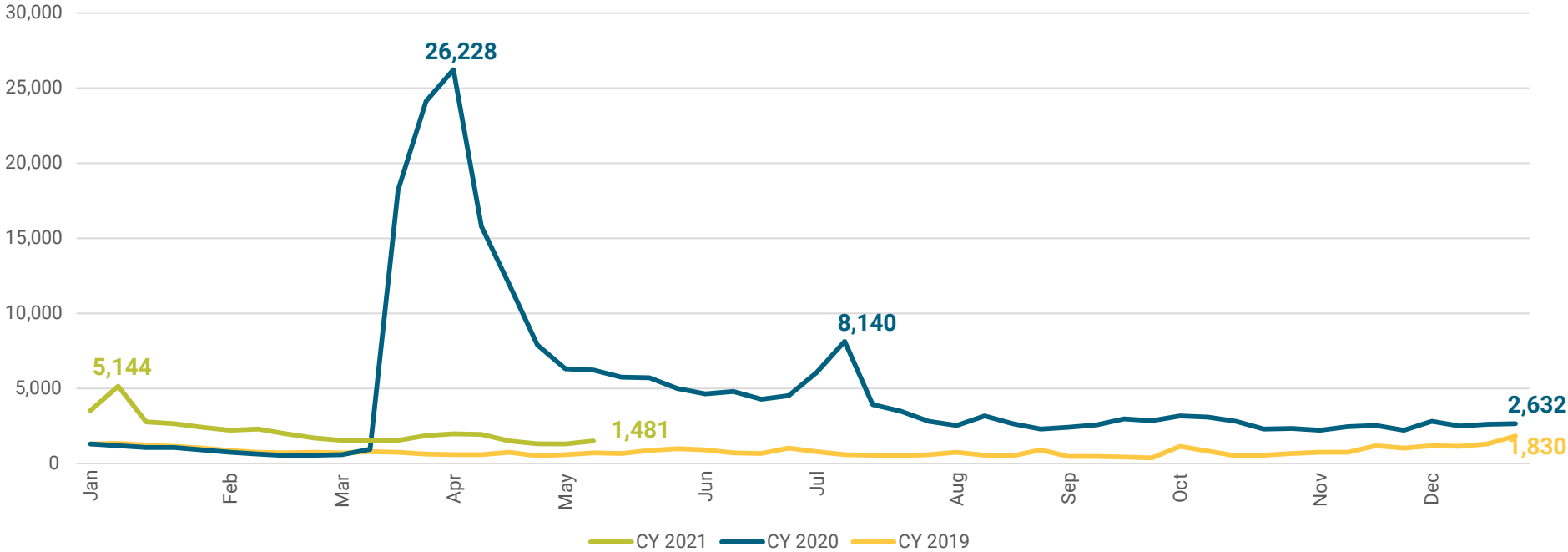
Initial claims are filed by individuals to request a determination of eligibility for unemployment insurance benefits or to begin a second or subsequent period of eligibility within a benefit year or period of eligibility. Initial claims are the first indicator of claiming trends.

Continued Weeks Claimed are the number of weeks of benefits claimed, including weeks for which a waiting period or fixed disqualification period is being served. This is not a count of individuals or a count of approved claims. Looking at continued weeks claimed does provided insight into ongoing claiming trends and is the best source to get a picture of claiming in a given time period.

Weeks Paid are the numbers of benefit weeks claimed for which UI benefits are paid. Weeks paid for partial unemployment are included, which include claimants who are working but still qualify for some benefits. Like continued weeks claimed, weeks paid is not a count of individuals, as a claimant can be paid for multiple weeks during a single week.

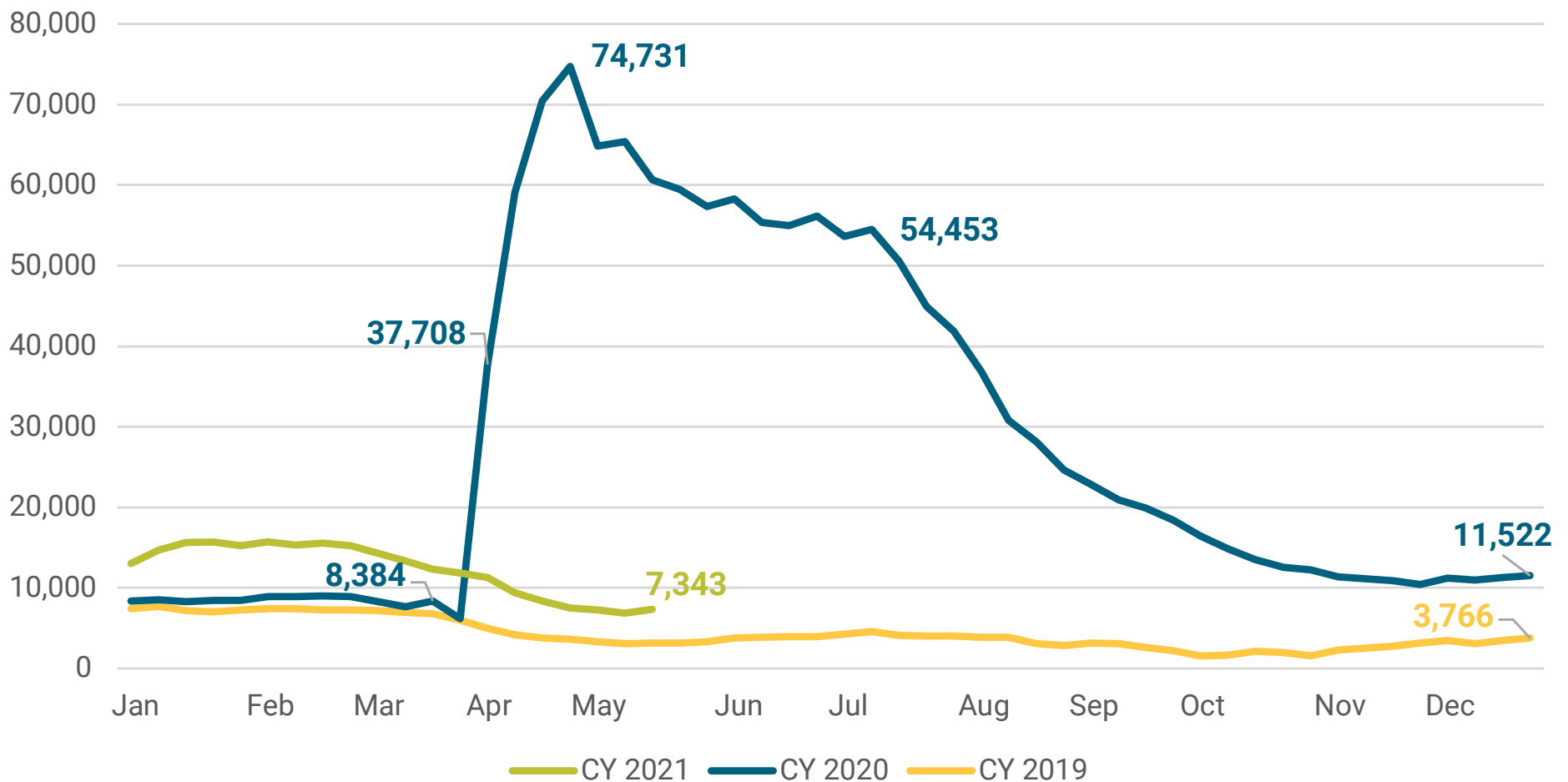
Total UI Numbers Since Pandemic Onset

Regular Initial Claims



The peak of initial claims, or new applications for benefits, came the week ending April 4, 2020. Just three weeks before the peak, the number of regular initial claims was 934. In 2019, the most claims were filed during the last week of December, with 1,830 initial claims, which is consistent for that time of year with seasonal layoffs. (2)

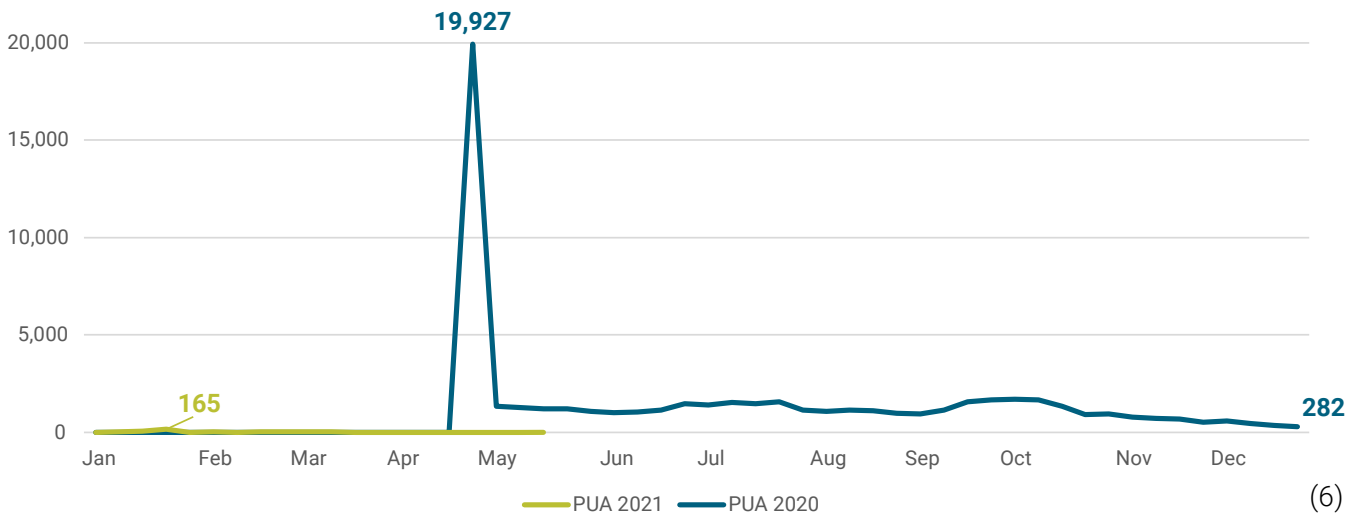
Regular Continued Claims



Continued weeks refer to the individual weeks of unemployment claimed after a person applies for benefits. Continued claims are a good measure of weekly unemployment levels and can be used to determine long term unemployment. Due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy, the number of regular unemployment insurance continued weeks claimed being filed in Nebraska started to increase significantly during the week ending March 21, 2020. (2)

Nebraska saw its peak in continued claims during the week ending April 25, 2020 (74,731). As a comparison, in 2019, the week in which the highest number of regular unemployment insurance weekly continued claims were filed was the second week of January (7,705). This is a difference of 67,026 weekly claims filed from the peak week in 2019 to the peak week in 2020. Regular Unemployment Insurance continued claims declined significantly in the closing months of 2020, then leveled off.

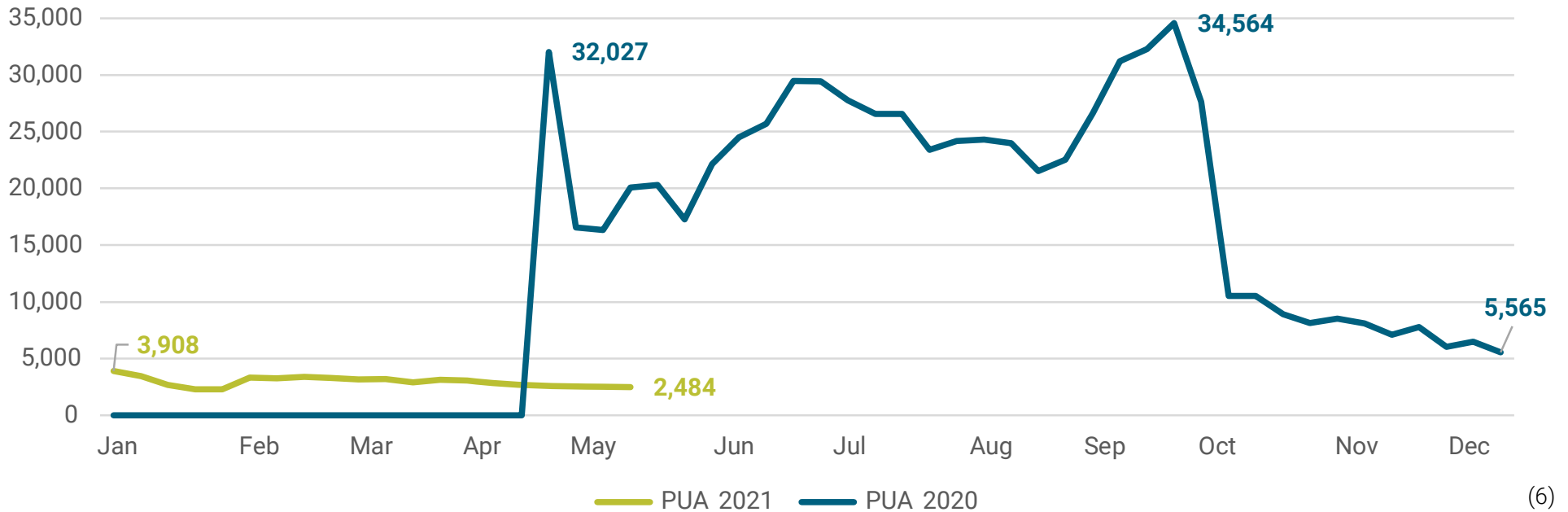
PUA Initial Claims



PUA initial claims peaked shortly after regular claims, as some individuals' claims were transitioned to PUA once the NEworks system was able to process these claims. After the initial surge in PUA claims, the number of new PUA claims per week declined dramatically and stayed relatively steady. (6)

PUA continued claims remained high from the end of April to October 2020 and started to trend down since then. From the peak of continued claims (34,564) to the week ending March 20, 2021, the continued claims have dropped over 91.6% and continue to drop around 1% every few weeks. (6)

PUA Continued Claims



(6)

Benefit Programs

UI – Regular State Unemployment Insurance

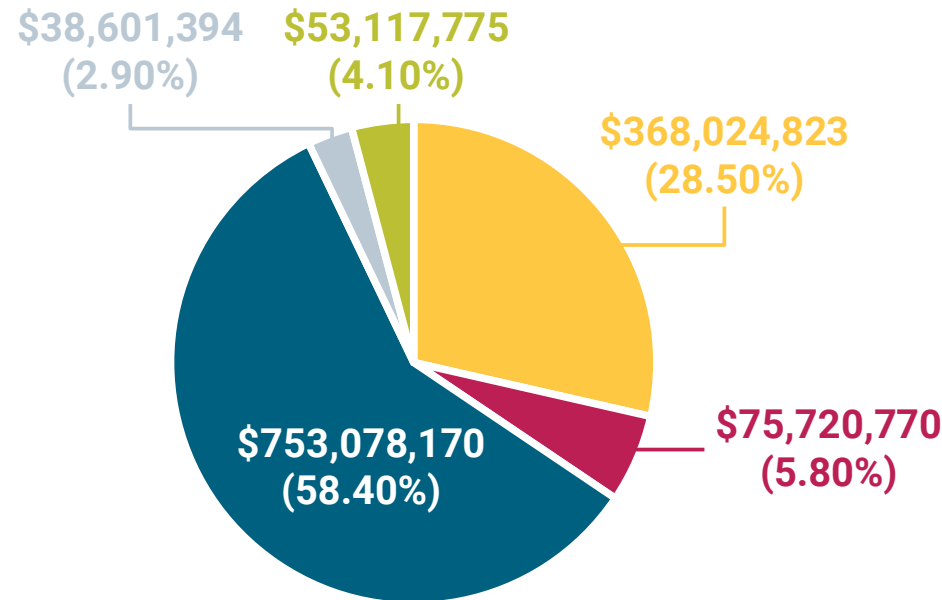
PUA – Pandemic Unemployment Assistance
(gig workers/self-employed)

FPUC – Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation
(\$600/\$300 weekly UI benefits to eligible claimants)

PEUC – Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation
(extension of regular state unemployment insurance benefits)

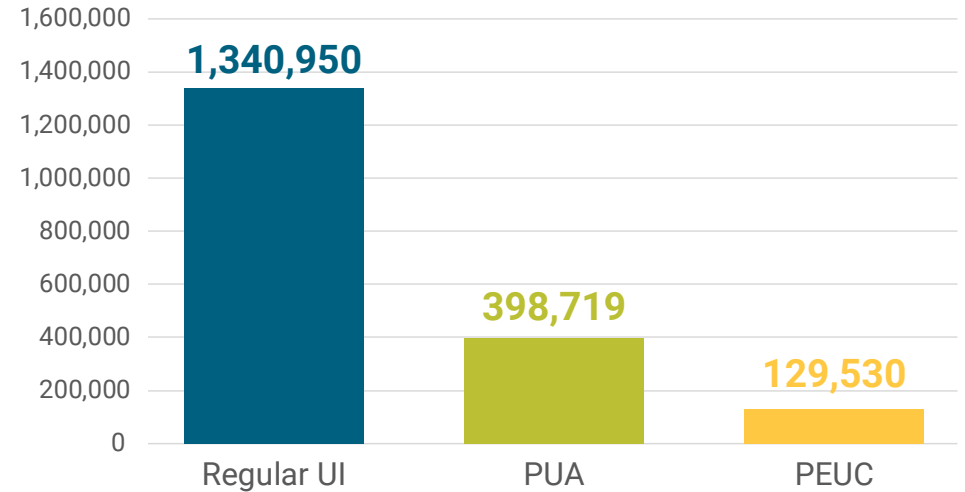
LWA – Lost Wages Assistance
(\$300/weekly retroactive payments)

Amount Paid by Benefit Type



(7) UI PUA FPUC PEUC LWA

Weeks of Unemployment Benefits Paid by UI Program

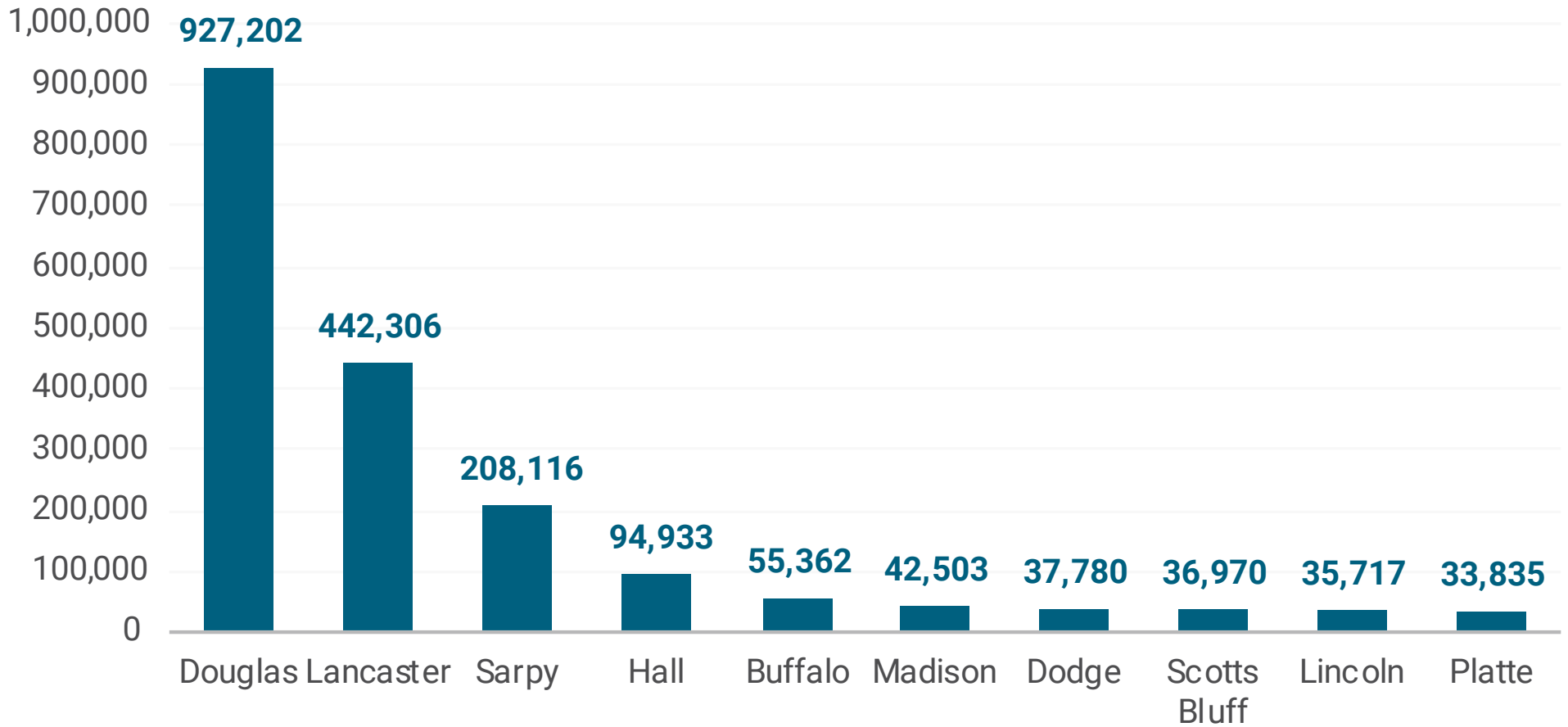


Weeks Paid

During the first year of the COVID-19 Pandemic (March 2020 to March 2021), the Nebraska Department of Labor (NDOL) paid 1,869,199 weeks of unemployment.

Demographics by Continued Weeks Claimed

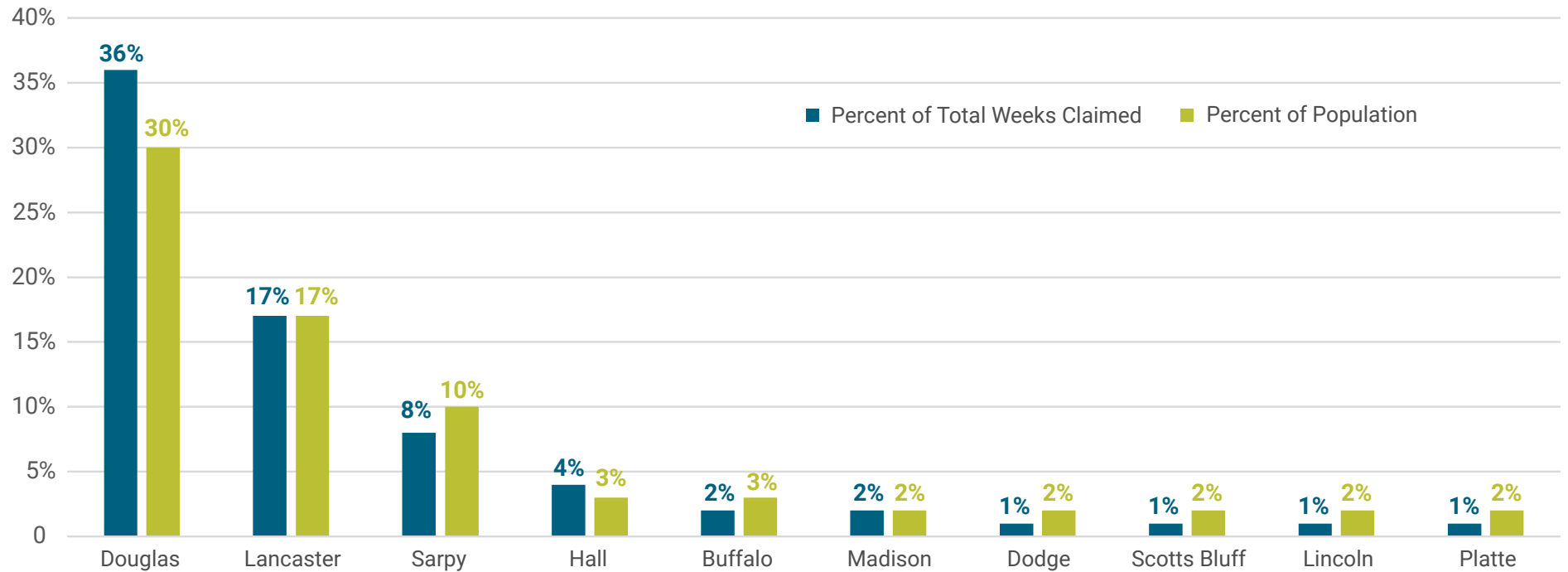
Top Ten Counties by Continued Weeks Claimed



County Data

Nebraska's most populated counties had the most continued weeks claimed. The ranking of counties by number of claims corresponds with the rankings by population size, with the exception of Madison County's claims. Douglas County had 36% of Nebraska's total continued claims, more than all of the state's other counties combined, except for Lancaster (389,260), Sarpy (180,426), and the unknown/not provided (194,956) category. Unknown/not provided is not included in the above graph. (3) (8)

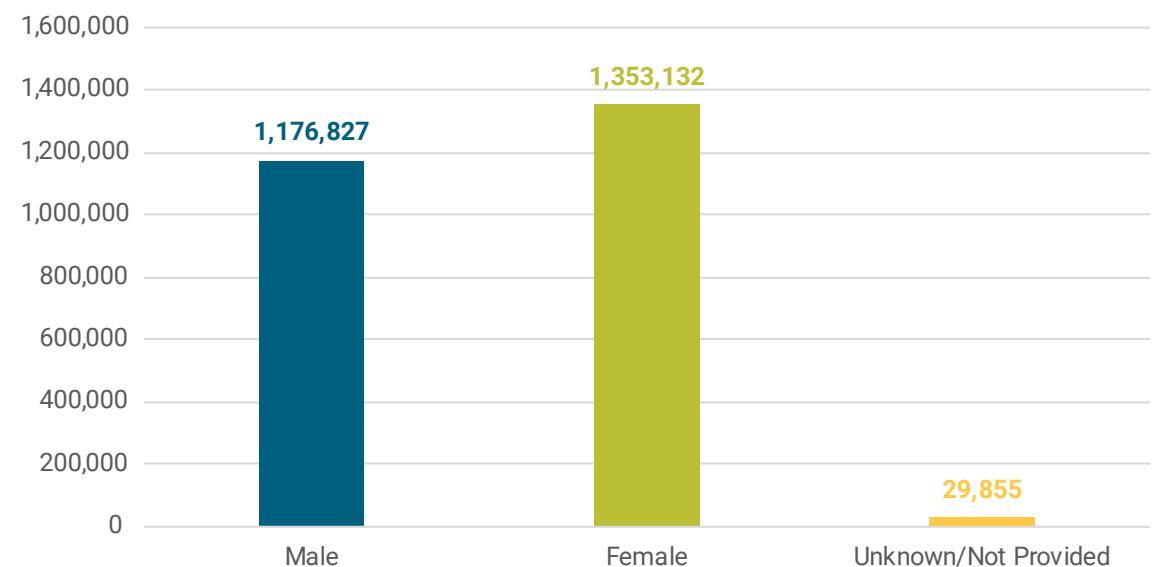
Top Ten Counties by Continued Weeks and Population



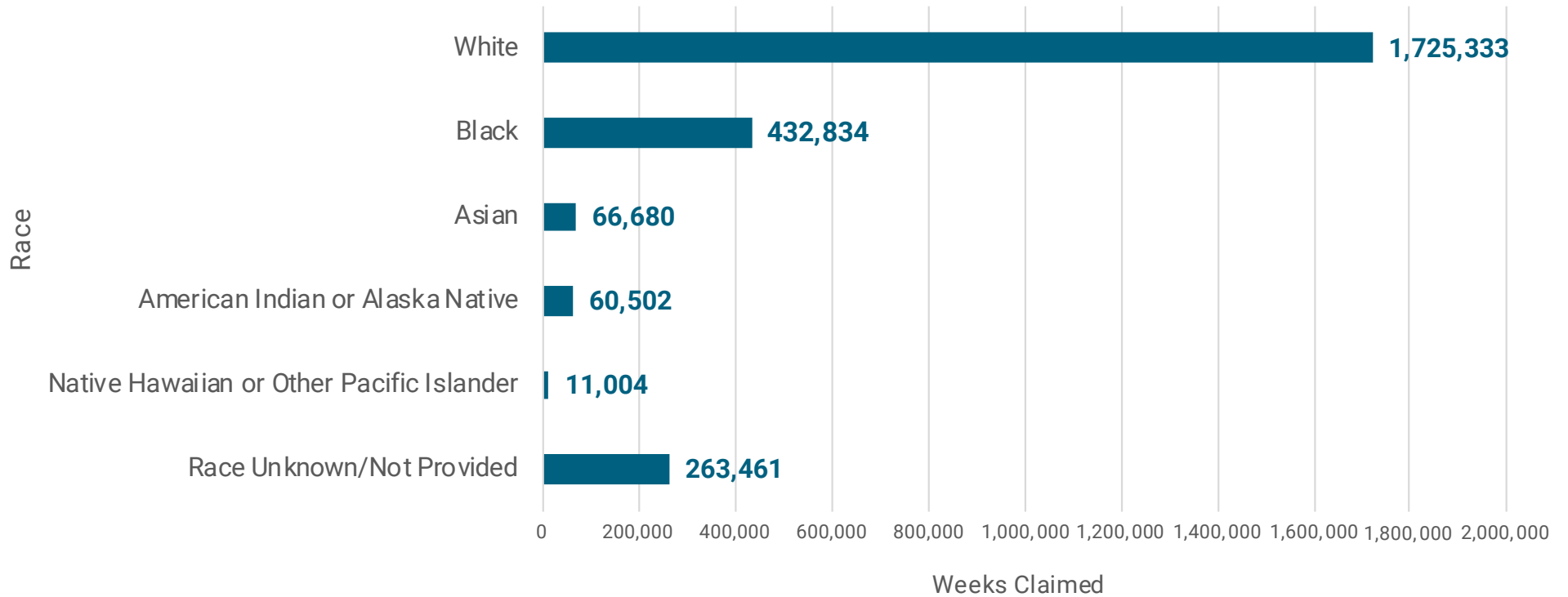
Gender Data

Looking at continued weeks claimed, women’s employment was impacted more by the effects of COVID-19, especially in the early stages of the pandemic. This corresponded with the implementation of directed health measures that limited many service industries and occupations, where women make up the majority of the workforce. Claims filed by women outnumbered those filed by men every week from March 21, 2020 to September 12, 2020. Since the last week of November, men have accounted for a larger share of weekly claims, which conforms with normal seasonal unemployment patterns. (3)

Total Continued Weeks Claimed by Gender



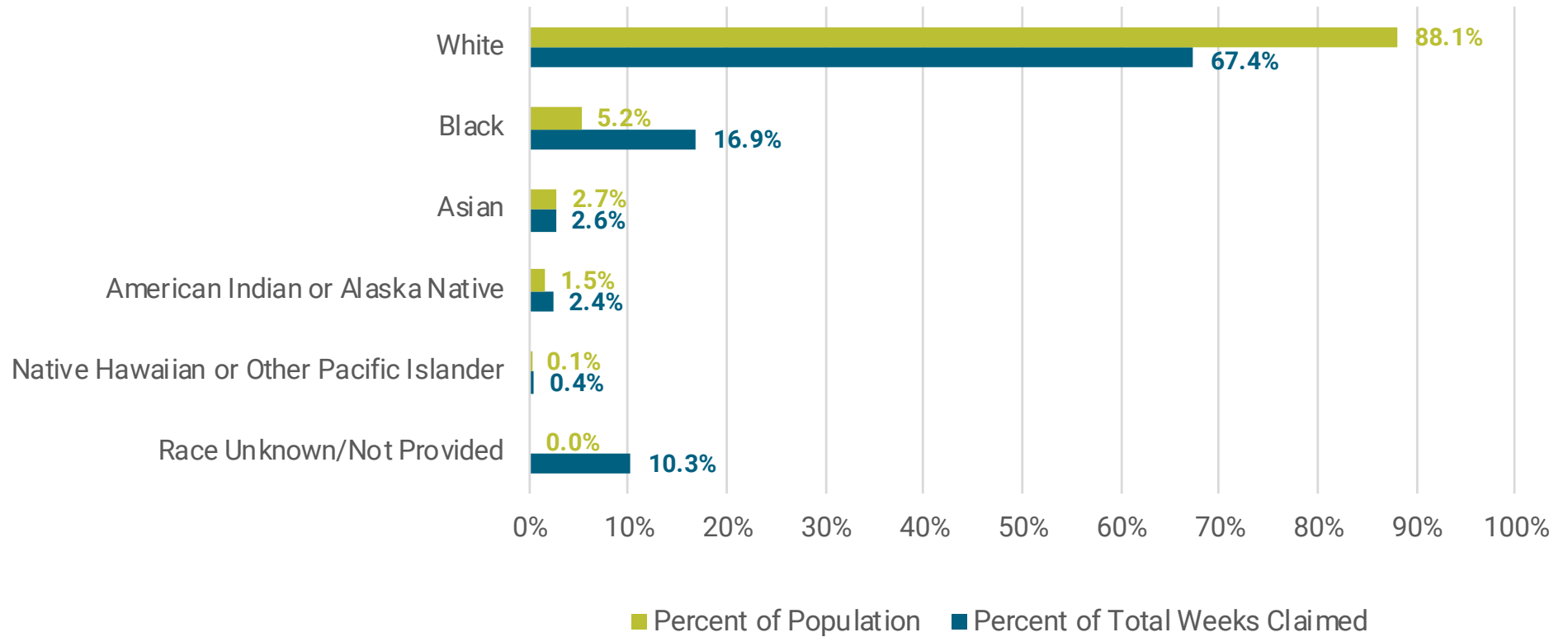
Total Weeks Claimed by Race



Race Data

The racial groups with the most weeks claimed between March 2020 and March 2021 were white (1,725,333), Black or African American (432,834), and Asian (66,680). Weeks claimed by race data generally tracked with Nebraska’s overall population demographics, with the largest groups accounting for the most UI claims. (3)

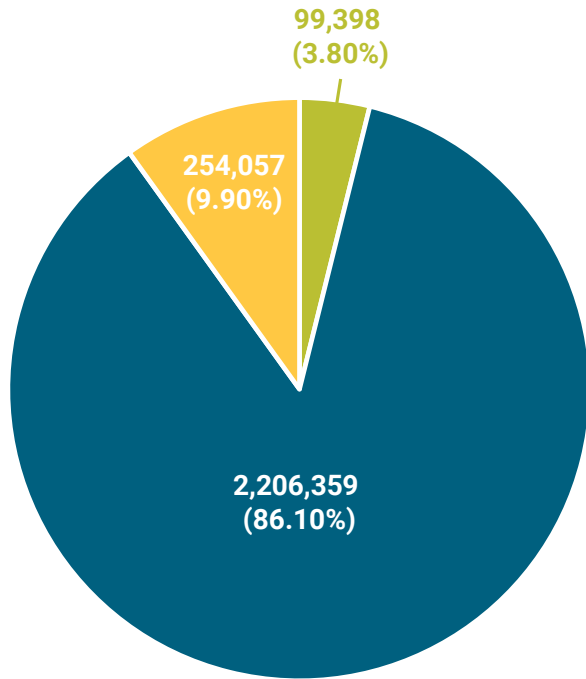
Percentage of Total Weeks Claimed by Race vs Percentage of Population by Race



Peak Week (2020)	Race	Number of Weeks Claimed
April 18	Asian	4,484
	Race Unknown	9,219
May 2	White	69,458
May 9	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	389
June 20	American Indian or Alaska Native	2,168
September 26	Black or African American	17,877

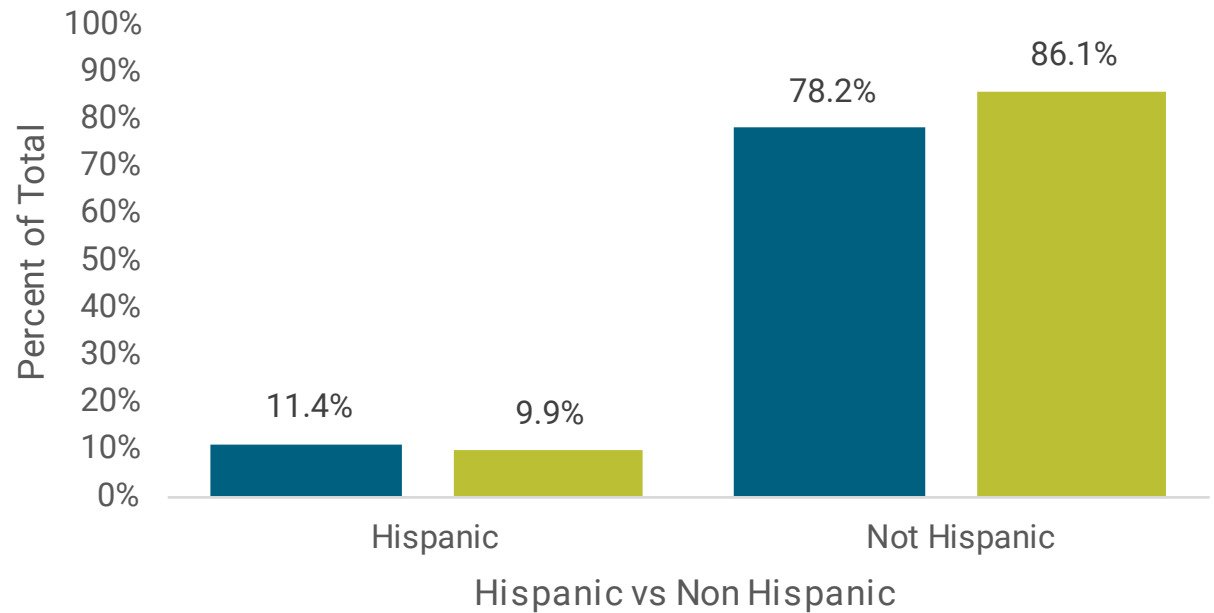
Although Black or African American Nebraskans made up a little over 5% of the total population, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, they comprised close to 17% of the UI continued weeks claimed from March 2020 to March 2021. Claims from Black or African American Nebraskans also peaked in terms of weeks claimed months after all other races. (3)(8)

Total Weeks Claimed by Ethnicity



■ Ethnicity Unknown ■ Not Hispanic ■ Hispanic

Share of Nebraska Population vs Share of Unemployment Insurance Weeks Claimed by Ethnicity

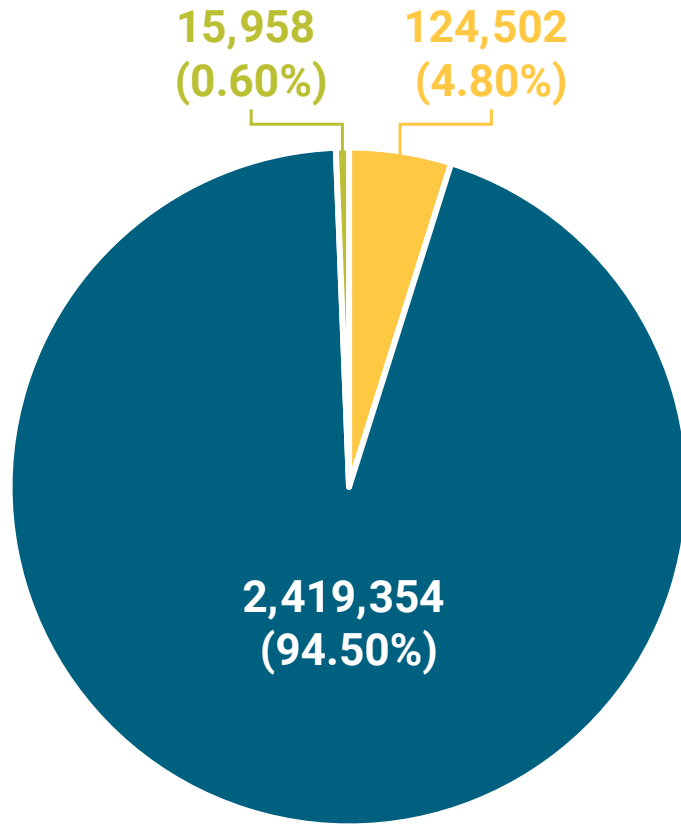


■ Percentage of Population ■ Percentage of Weeks Claimed

Ethnicity Data

Hispanic or Latino Nebraskans make up 11.4% of the state’s total population and accounted for 9.9% of continued weeks claimed between March 2020 and March 2021. The weeks ending April 18, 2020 and June 20, 2020 were the peak continued claim weeks for this group. (3) (8)

Total Weeks Claimed by Veteran Status

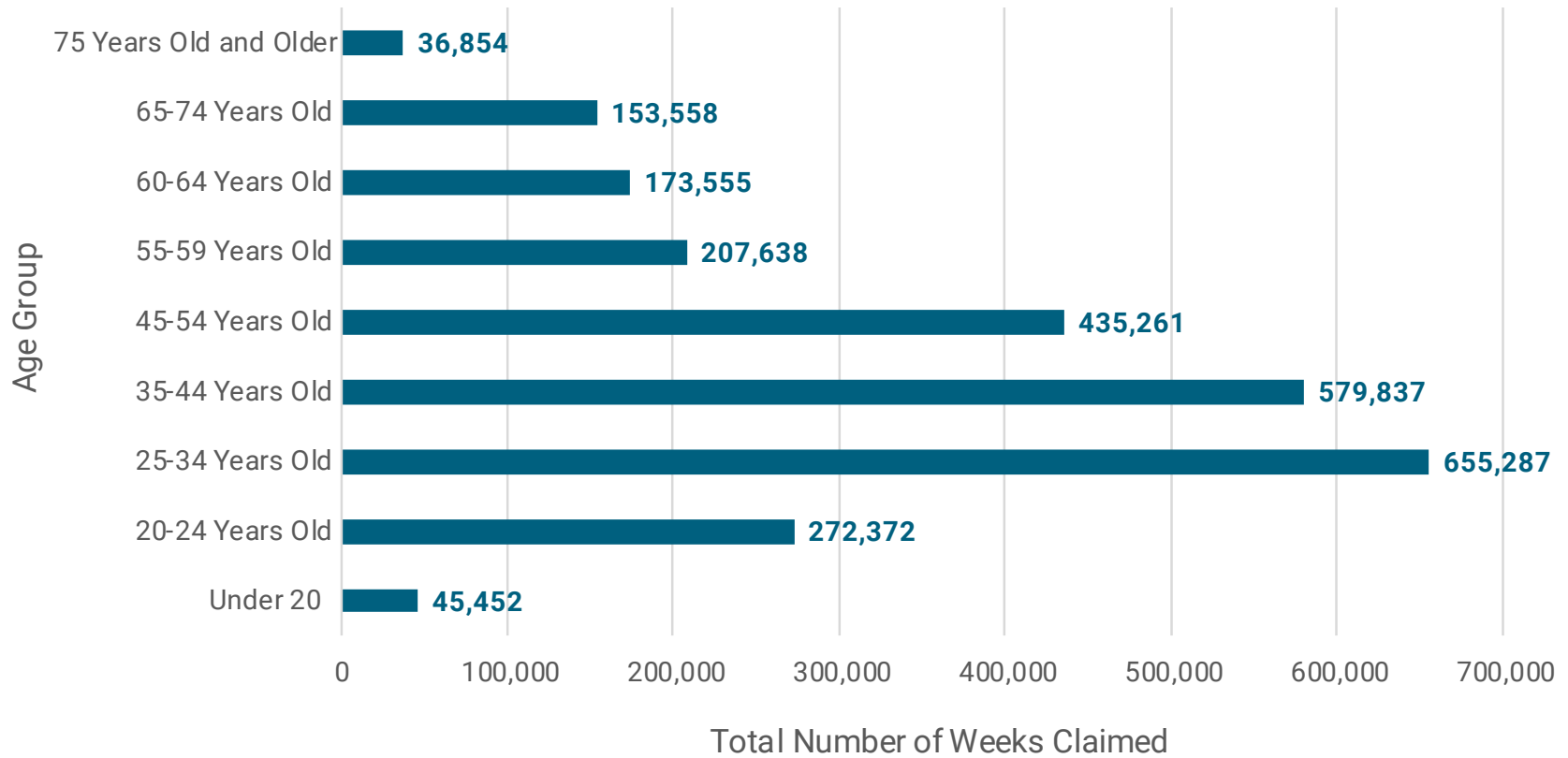


■ Veteran ■ Non-Veteran ■ Unknown/Not Provided

Veteran Status

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, as of September 30, 2017, veterans made up 9.5% of Nebraska's total population, which was nearly 3% higher than the veteran population nationwide. The week ending April 18, 2020 saw the largest number of continued weeks claimed for veterans (5,743). Veterans filed only 4.8% of total weeks claimed between March 2020 and March 2021. This may be primarily because close to half of the state's veterans (48%) were ages 65 and older. (3) (9)

Total Weeks Claimed by Age



Age Data

Most continued weeks were claimed by individuals in the 25 to 54 age category, with the highest-claiming group being ages 25 to 34. This is in line with the state's overall demographics, with the 25-54 age category making up 63.2% of the state's total workforce as of the second quarter of 2020. (3) (10)

Weeks Claimed by Occupation and Industry

Occupations with Most Weeks Claimed During the COVID-19 Pandemic by Quarter

Ranking	Q1 of COVID-19 Pandemic	Q2 of COVID-19 Pandemic	Q3 of COVID-19 Pandemic	Q4 of COVID-19 Pandemic
#1	Waiters and Waitresses	Waiters and Waitresses	Cashiers	Construction Laborers
#2	Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists	Cashiers	Customer Service Representatives	Customer Service Representatives
#3	Retail Salespersons	Customer Service Representatives	Waiters and Waitresses	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers
#4	Bartenders	Retail Salespersons	Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists	Cashiers
#5	Cashiers	Childcare Workers	Childcare Workers	Landscaping and Groundskeeping Workers
#6	Childcare Workers	Driver/Sales Workers	Driver/Sales Workers	Waiters and Waitresses
#7	Customer Service Representatives	Bartenders	Production Workers, All Other	Production Workers, All Other
#8	Cooks, Restaurant	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	Retail Salespersons	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand
#9	Manicurists and Pedicurists	Production Workers, All Other	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	Driver/Sales Workers
#10	Managers, All Other	Cooks, Restaurant	Barbers	Cement Masons and Concrete Finishers

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, service-industry occupations top the list for continued weeks claimed by occupation. Many of these same occupations topped the lists for the second and third quarters, as well. During the fourth quarter, we began to see a shift toward seasonal occupations accounting for the highest number of continued weeks claimed. These occupations were construction laborers (#1); landscaping and groundskeeping workers (#5); and cement masons and concrete finishers (#10). (3)

Occupations with Most Weeks Claimed March 2020–March 2021

Ranking	Full Year of COVID-19 Pandemic
#1	Waiters and Waitresses
#2	Cashiers
#3	Customer Service Representatives
#4	Retail Salespersons
#5	Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists
#6	Childcare Workers
#7	Bartenders
#8	Driver/Sales Workers
#9	Production Workers, All Other
#10	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the occupations with the highest number of continued weeks claimed were service oriented. These included waiters and waitresses (#1); cashiers (#2); customer service representatives (#3); retail salespersons (#4); hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists (#5); and bartenders (#7). (3)

Industries with the Most Initial Claims March 2020–March 2021

Ranking	Full Year of COVID-19 Pandemic
#1	Accommodation and Food Services
#2	Health Care and Social Assistance
#3	Retail Trade
#4	Manufacturing
#5	Construction
#6	Other Services (except Public Administration)
#7	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services
#8	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation
#9	Transportation and Warehousing
#10	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services

Accommodation and food services, health care and social assistance, and retail trade each consistently ranked in the top five industries for initial claims filed across all four quarters. These quarterly trends were reflected in the yearly rankings, with accommodation and food services, health care and social assistance, and retail trade placing as the top three industry sectors for initial claims filed. (3)

During the first three quarters of the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry with the highest number of initial claims filed was accommodation and food services. During the fourth quarter, we began to see a switch to more seasonality in the claims filed. As a result, the construction industry had the highest number of initial claims filed.

Industries with the Most Initial Claims During the COVID-19 Pandemic by Quarter

Ranking	1st Quarter of COVID-19 Pandemic	2nd Quarter of COVID-19 Pandemic	3rd Quarter of COVID-19 Pandemic	4th Quarter of COVID-19 Pandemic
#1	Accommodation and Food Services	Accommodation and Food Services	Accommodation and Food Services	Construction
#2	Health Care and Social Assistance	Health Care and Social Assistance	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	Accommodation and Food Services
#3	Retail Trade	Retail Trade	Health Care and Social Assistance	Retail Trade
#4	Manufacturing	Manufacturing	Retail Trade	Health Care and Social Assistance
#5	Other Services (except Public Administration)	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	Finance and Insurance	Manufacturing
#6	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	Construction	Manufacturing	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services
#7	Construction	Other Services (except Public Administration)	Other Services (except Public Administration)	Transportation and Warehousing
#8	Educational Services	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation
#9	Transportation and Warehousing	Transportation and Warehousing	Construction	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
#10	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	Educational Services	Transportation and Warehousing	Finance and Insurance

Conclusion

Nebraska paid out over 1.2 billion dollars in state and federal unemployment benefits from March 2020 to March 2021. NDOL processed four years' worth of unemployment claims in just four months. After the peak in continued weeks, claims declined drastically, but remain above pre-pandemic levels. The accommodation and food service industries were the hardest hit. All demographics of people were impacted, but continued weeks claimed data indicates that women and black or African American Nebraskans were some of the groups hit the hardest in terms of unemployment.

The latest unemployment statistics are available at [NEworks.nebraska.gov](https://www.nebraska.gov/works).

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