



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Sept. 15 Oregon Employment Department Media Statement

Our next media briefing is scheduled for 1 p.m., Wednesday, Sept. 29.

Employment

Yesterday, the Oregon Employment Department released the August unemployment rate and jobs numbers for Oregon. In addition to the summary below, more details can be found in the [full news release](#) and this [video recap](#).

Oregon's unemployment rate had another significant drop, from 5.2% in July to 4.9% in August.

- The number of unemployed Oregonians fell by 6,500 over the month.
- The U.S. unemployment rate was 5.4% in July, and fell to 5.2% in August.
- Oregon's unemployment rate improved from its all-time high of 13.2% to below 4.9% in 17 months.
- By comparison, after peaking at 12.3% during the Great Recession, it took Oregon's unemployment rate more than six years (80 months) to drop below 5%.

Oregon's unemployment rate has only been below 5.0% during two other periods of time; both were among the strongest economic expansion times in the state.

Oregon's jobs recovery continued in August, and the labor market continued to tighten. Employers added 7,900 jobs to nonfarm payrolls. As of August, Oregon has regained 72% of the jobs lost in the spring of 2020, compared with 76% for the U.S. Employers continue adding jobs to their payrolls at a relatively fast pace. Oregon added more than 80,000 jobs in the past 8 months.

Government added 3,500 jobs in August. These gains were concentrated in local government, reflecting public K-12 schools and public higher education staffing up for the school year and the return of in-person instruction.

Other sectors with large gains over the month included wholesale trade (+1,400 jobs), leisure and hospitality (+1,200), and professional and business services (+1,000). Leisure and hospitality employers have added as many jobs in the past 8 months as they did in the five years (61 months) leading up to the pandemic.



Within professional and business services, the professional and technical services (architectural, engineering, computer systems design) has been the strongest part of the economy coming out of the recession. These employers had 4,300 more jobs in August 2021 than they did in February 2020.

The only broad area of Oregon's economy to lose jobs in August was retail trade, which dropped 1,900 jobs. Although retail has regained 9 out of 10 jobs lost in the spring of 2020, this August was the second month of job losses in retail.

Back to Work Update

The Employment Department continues focusing on helping people find jobs or new careers and assisting employers in finding talented workers. We launched our Back To Work Campaign today in partnership with WorkSource Oregon.

WorkSource Oregon and partners are coordinating job fairs and hiring events across Oregon in 24 locations. Scavenger hunts, job fairs, drive thru and virtual hiring events, and even a 'Large Business Extravaganza'.

People can find out what events are happening in their area by contacting their local WorkSource center or at [WorkSourceOregon.org](https://www.worksourceoregon.org). All events will follow the state and CDC guidance to make sure everyone is safe during these events. To ensure the safety of our visitors and employees and prevent further spread of COVID-19, all customers and employees must wear masks.

Employment Department employees have a deep well of experience helping people find work during and after a recession, and the dedicated and knowledgeable employees can help people find the right job or training. Additional hiring events are scheduled throughout September and the rest of the year.

HealthCare Worker Outreach

There is an urgent, statewide need to fill health care and other positions that support the health care industry, like food service, facilities and business administration.

The Employment Department is reaching out to claimants with health care experience to let them know of job openings in their field. There is also a health care hiring event in the Clackamas WorkSource Oregon center on Wed., Sept. 22.

We are informing these claimants about:

- Training at an approved institution in high-demand occupations, including assistance with tuition and other associated costs such as text books
- Fee payment assistance for licensure testing or preparatory classes for testing
- Placement in on the job training or work experiences with employers
- Entrance in to apprenticeship programs or other earn and learn opportunities
- Supportive payments that would lead to success in training (gas voucher, for example)
- Paying for necessary equipment or clothing needed for a job opportunity



For more information, people can contact their local [WorkSource Oregon center](#).

Work Opportunity Tax Credit

As employers continue competing for workers in this job-seekers' market, we want to make sure they know how to save money and expand their candidate pool.

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) is a federal tax credit that most Oregon employers already qualify for, and it can save a business up to \$9600 per new hire.

Several factors determine how much the credit will be, including the category the new hire qualifies under, and their annual hours and wages. In Oregon, the average savings that businesses receive is about \$3,000 per qualified new hire.

This credit is available to employers who are hiring individuals who face barriers to employment, and includes many broad categories of individuals including veterans, people receiving SNAP or TANF, or people recently released from prison.

Our WOTC team can help employers start using the tax credit program. To receive the credit, they need to add two simple forms to their hiring process and then submit them online to the Employment Department through our online portal.

More information is at [OregonTaxCredit.org](#). After submitting information using the contact form, a WOTC team member will reach out to employers within one business day. Questions? Please call 503-507-8645.

Unemployment Insurance Benefits

Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA)

The PUA program expired September 4, 2021, however, we know some people who may have been eligible to file for PUA benefits have not done so yet.

Because of that, the federal PUA program is giving people extra time to file their initial claim for benefits and to file for retroactive weeks. The last day to do this is Wed., Oct. 6. We encourage people to file using the [Online Claim System](#). After Oct. 6, no one can make any changes or backdate weeks of a PUA claim.

The US Dept. of Labor requires that all people applying for PUA submit proof of employment. Our online interactive [PUA Employment/Self-Employment tool](#) can help people determine what document to submit.

New Temporary Benefit Eligibility Rules

The pandemic has changed the economy and how we work. Because of that, we want to make sure our benefit eligibility guidelines are updated to reflect these shifts.



Before the pandemic, a person had to be available for two shifts a day or they could not be eligible to receive benefits. That is changing.

Starting the week of Sept. 26, 2021, people filing for benefits must be available for suitable work for at least 40 hours per week OR one shift, if their work is shift based.

To make sure people know about this rule change, we are notifying claimants. They also may visit our online Temporary Eligibility Rule [FAQs](#) for more information.

Some examples of when temporary rule changes allows flexibility if someone is:

- Providing care for others in their household
- Helping their children with online schooling
- Having work-related transportation issues, or
- Facing other barriers.

If someone has barriers preventing them from returning to their work, to receive unemployment insurance benefits they must be willing to seek an alternate type of work in which they are available to work at least 40 hours per week or one shift per day.

We are hosting a webinar on the new temporary rules and PUA retroactive claim filing at 1 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 16. People can [register online](#) and also view past webinars.

We also will conduct listening sessions in October and November so business, labor, community organizations and others can give us feedback on these new temporary rules before we work on permanent availability rule changes.

One-on-One Orientation

We are partnering with WorkSource Oregon (WSO) on this temporary rule change. All people filing a new claim for benefits must complete a one-on-one orientation at a WorkSource Oregon center.

Unemployment rules are complicated, and many people have not applied for benefits before the pandemic, or it has been a long time since they have received unemployment insurance benefits.

During this one-on-one orientation, an employment expert will work with the job seeker to review their availability to work and identify any barriers preventing them from being considered available for suitable work. We want to make sure new claimants know about this requirement, because if people do not complete their required one-on-one orientation, their benefits will stop.

Starting Thursday, Sept. 16, people can register for their WorkSource Oregon orientation using our new scheduling tool ScheduleOnce. This scheduling tool can be found at [WorkSource.org](#) by clicking on the Contact button. The tool has options to schedule virtual and in-person appointments and also to use WorkSource Oregon computers for their work searches.



Employer Payroll Tax Relief

The Employment Department is working to implement [HB 3389](#), the employer payroll tax relief legislation. There are two parts to this legislation. First, it rolls back the UI tax experience rating for years 2022 through 2024 to the pre-pandemic 2020 UI tax experience rate (benefit ratio). The rate will be based on an employer's experience rate prior to the pandemic.

Second, the relief plan allows employers who meet certain criteria to defer up to one-third of their 2021 UI taxes until June 30, 2022, without accruing interest or penalties on the deferred amount. Employers need to meet [all conditions](#) to be eligible for UI tax deferral and forgiveness.

Deferred Claims

The Employment Department has moved approximately 11,000 PEUC claims that had a deferred status regular Unemployment Insurance claim.

People with deferred claims had filed a claim in 2020 and filed a new claim for benefits in 2021. They qualified for a new claim; however, it was deferred and they continued receiving PEUC benefits until the PEUC claim expired Sept. 4.

These claimants must serve a waiting week before they can receive their benefits.

Customer Service

We promised throughout the pandemic to be transparent. Current data show that 93 percent of Contact Us inquiries are now resolved within seven days. We are experiencing a delay with our call data information and hope to provide an update on call wait times during next week's media briefing.

Benefits Paid

The Oregon Employment Department paid \$10.9 billion in benefits to more than 616,000 people from March 15, 2020, to Sept. 14, 2021. Last week, we paid about \$89 million to 115,000 people. Detailed information can be found on the [media dashboard](#).