



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Jan. 6, 2022 Oregon Employment Department Media Statement

Our next media availability is scheduled for 1 p.m., Wed., Jan. 19

Economic update

Although the new year has begun, the Oregon Employment Department is still looking at 2021 in terms of labor market data. January through November of 2021 showed strong recovery across most areas of the economy. Oregon employers added 100,000 jobs in the first 11 months of the year.

Strong hiring and ongoing, high levels of job openings also seem to be creating confidence for workers about their prospects to find another job. A record 4.5 million U.S. workers (or 3% of the workforce) [quit their jobs](#) in November. Oregon has a similar rate of workers quitting jobs. The most recent state-level data show [3% of Oregon workers quit](#) in October.

It is too soon for any data to reflect the impact of the latest wave of the pandemic. Any potential employment effects from the omicron variant are unlikely to be reflected in Oregon's upcoming unemployment rate and jobs numbers for December. That is because COVID case counts started rising at the end of the month. The surveys of households and businesses that



help determine the unemployment rate and monthly jobs changes took place in the middle of December.

“We can anticipate that more COVID spread in our communities might have larger impacts on parts of the economy providing in-person services,” said State Employment Economist Gail Krumenaur. “Some of these sectors – such as private health care, and both public and private education – were already struggling to regain or add jobs prior to the omicron wave of COVID-19.”

COVID-19 still poses a barrier to some Oregonians’ ability to work. Between Dec. 1 and Dec. 13, the [Census Household Pulse survey](#) shows 46,000 adults in Oregon who weren’t working said the main reason was fear of getting or spreading COVID. Nearly 34,000 Oregon adults said they weren’t working because they either had COVID or were caring for someone with COVID or coronavirus symptoms.

Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program Welcomes New Deputy Director

With the new year, Juan Serratos assumed his new position as the deputy director for the Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance program. Serratos started on Monday, Jan. 3.

Serratos has spent the better part of two decades working in the public sector. Before joining OED, he was a manager for the Oregon Department of Human Services, Self-Sufficiency program, where he helped transform operations and fostered an inclusive and welcoming environment. He also worked for the Oregon Department of Justice, Division of Child Support, where he led his team through the modernization of the state’s Child Support Case Management computer system.

PFMLI Director Karen Humelbaugh continues recruiting for other key leadership positions, “We plan on making more announcements soon,” she said.



Equity and Inclusion Consultant Starts Working with OED Teams

The department has started working with Subduction Consulting for three key teams within our agency – PFMLI, Unemployment Insurance Tax and Modernization.

Subduction's expertise is in conflict transformation for organizational equity services. The Department chose these three teams as they are integral to rolling out the PFMLI program. Subduction will work with these teams to identify current organizational dynamics, perspectives, and their collective understanding of equity concepts. The consultants will also provide executive coaching, leadership team strategy sessions, and team-building capacity sessions.

Subduction is certified through the Oregon Certification Office for Business Inclusion and Diversity (COBID), and its team has more than 20 years of experience in organizational equity, conflict resolution, and community development, and they collaborate with other organizations and BIPOC colleagues across the state to provide trainings and consultation.

Their work centers the voices, experiences, and wisdom of the most historically impacted (those living at the intersections of race, class and gender). Through its work with Subduction, the goal is to build relationships, capacity and momentum to transform the department's organizational culture and systems towards more equitable outcomes for both customers and employees.

Some Claimant Benefits May Be Reduced with Expiring Laws

As a reminder, starting this week (ending Jan. 8), if a person claims a week of benefits, they may receive a lower weekly benefit amount if they are working part-time and receiving benefits. This change is due to the



expiration of temporary, pandemic-related provisions in SB 1701 and HB 3178.

These two laws allowed people to earn up to \$300 a week and still receive unemployment insurance benefits without having those earnings reducing their weekly benefit amount. This helped more people continue receiving unemployment while working part-time. However, this temporary legislation expired Jan. 1, 2022.

Starting this month, the income limit will be **whichever is higher**:

- One-third of the claimant's weekly benefit amount; or
- Ten times Oregon's highest minimum wage—which is now \$14 per hour, so this would be \$140.

This means a person's unemployment insurance benefit amount will be reduced dollar for dollar if they report earnings over those income limits. If a person earns more than their weekly benefit amount for a claimed week, they would not be eligible for benefits that week.

These laws helped Oregonians continue to receive optimal benefits during a time when they were needed the most. From May to Nov. 2021, more than 48,000 people benefited from the law and approximately \$21 million in additional benefits was paid. That does not include the additional \$300 federal weekly supplement this law allowed some people to qualify for.

Hiring Heroes for Healthcare Statewide Job Fair

The Oregon Employment Department and our WorkSource Oregon partners are hosting an upcoming statewide "Hiring Heroes for Healthcare" virtual and in-person job fair on Wednesday, Jan. 12.



Hosted by WorkSource Oregon partners, the event will feature more than 50 employers from across Oregon who will share information about job openings for nurses, technicians, food service workers and other positions found in typical healthcare settings.

This event was conducted virtually a few months ago, and was so successful that the Department and WorkSource Oregon partners decided to do it again.

Job seekers are encouraged to contact their local WorkSource Oregon center for more information on their local event.

Overpayment Waivers Can Help People Avoid Paying Back Benefits

Unemployment insurance benefits play a vital role in helping people stay in their homes and keeping communities strong. However, if someone receives benefits for which they were not eligible, they will have to pay the money back. For many, receiving an overpayment notice can be scary and add stress to an already difficult time in people's lives.

When Oregonians received benefit payments during the pandemic, they received funds from many different temporary federal programs and the regular Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits program. That means there are multiple programs, each with different waiver requirements for overpayments. With so many federal and state laws at play, claimants may not know for which waiver to apply.

The Employment Department has a “no wrong door” approach to waivers. Once a request is made, the department will work with each person to ensure they complete the right form and provide the correct information, regardless of which waiver they applied for. For example, if someone applies for a Lost Wage Assistance (LWA) waiver request and they qualify for a state waiver, the department will help them complete the correct waiver request form.



In 2021, the department conducted outreach regarding waivers. People were notified through media briefings, social media posts, and weekly email updates and targeted email campaigns.

To reduce confusion, the Employment Department rolled out targeted communications to different groups who may be eligible for an overpayment waiver, starting with those for the federal pandemic programs.

The Department will be reaching out to claimants who may be eligible for state waivers later this month.

The Department encourages any claimant who received an overpayment notice to request an overpayment waiver if repayment of that overpayment would be a financial hardship.

- If they were overpaid state benefits – which is regular unemployment insurance – they should use the [state waiver form](#).
- If they were overpaid federal benefits such as Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), or Lost Wages Assistance (LWA), they should use this [federal waiver form](#).

If a person doesn't have their overpayment notice or needs help figuring out which waiver to use, they should use the department's online [Contact Us](#) form or call 503-947-1995.

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Equal Opportunity program — auxiliary aids and services available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Contact: 971-673-6400. For people who are deaf or hard of hearing, call 711 Telecommunications Relay Services.