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Oklahoma Initial Unemployment Four-Week Average Declines for Sixth Consecutive Week

First call resolution up to 43% due to new training and knowledge initiatives

OKLAHOMA CITY – The Oklahoma Employment Security Commission reported a significant decline in initial claims filed for the week of Aug. 1, down 36% from the previous week. Additionally, the less volatile initial claims four-week moving average has declined for the sixth consecutive week, down 88% from late June’s average of 70,323.

“I’m pleased to see these continued decreases in our state unemployment numbers,” said OESC Interim Executive Director Shelley Zumwalt. “While this is likely due to several factors, I’m proud of our efforts in July at the in-person claim events to successfully help more than 10,000 Oklahomans get the help they needed. While we celebrate this success, we’re continuing to work to provide new solutions to further relieve the strain on unemployed Oklahomans.”

The agency’s continued focus remains on process improvements to provide help to Oklahomans. As a result of efficiencies implemented over the past month, as well as from the success in helping thousands through in-person events, OESC has continued to see an increase in first-call resolution with 43% of callers getting their issues resolved through just one call.

In addition, more than 50 people who began training in early July to assist with claims processing needs are currently halfway through the program. These trainees will begin assisting with claims processing on a supervised basis starting mid-August and fully start in early September. These additional agents will represent a 100% increase in claims agents available to help claimants over the phone.

“Early in my tenure at OESC we made some difficult decisions to ensure that our processes would become increasingly efficient in getting Oklahomans their unemployment benefits,” Zumwalt said. “From combining tier 1 and tier 2 processes at our call center to investing in additional agents, these changes have meant more Oklahomans are getting direct assistance to help them pay their bills and feed their families.”

Update on Pending Claims

The Department of Labor recently required OESC to change the weekly unemployment claim questions related to COVID-19 and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC). These new questions verify that extended claim weeks for regular UI claims are related to the pandemic and qualify for the extended benefits coverage provided by the PEUC program.

If PEUC claims are not related to the pandemic, the claims will be stopped as a result. If a claimant has seen their claim paused and needs to correct their previous responses to these questions, a claims agent can help manually adjust this. This can be done in person or over the phone through any of the 27 regional offices across Oklahoma. A full list of regional offices and their contact information can be found here: <https://oesc.ok.gov/oesc-office-location-finder>.

“This DOL change has increased the number of pending unemployment claims we’re seeing in the state,” Zumwalt said. “But we’re still hovering around 5,000-12,000 pending claims per week. A major improvement from the 129,000 claims we were looking at when I took over in late May. While pending claims will never be zero — it shouldn’t be if we’re running a healthy system blocking fraud claims and other questionable claims — the actions we’re taking to improve our fraud measures, addressing issues as they arise, and increasing the number of trained agents will help Oklahomans get the assistance they need.”

Weekly Unemployment Numbers for Week Ending Aug. 1

Initial claims and continued claims for unemployment insurance benefits decline in the last week of July.

- For the week ending Aug. 1, the advance number of initial claims, unadjusted, totaled 5,720, a decrease of 3,207 from the previous week's revised level of 8,927.
- Initial claims' four-week moving average was 8,552, a decrease of 926 from the previous week's revised average of 9,477.
- The advance unadjusted number of continued claims totaled 114,130, a decrease of 13,487 from the previous week's revised level of 127,617.
- Continued claims' four-week moving average was 125,203, a decrease of 4,226 from the previous week's revised average of 129,429.

Nationally, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims during the same period was 1,186,000, a decrease of 249,000 from the previous week's revised level, the U.S. Department of Labor reports. The four-week moving average was 1,337,750, a decrease of 31,000 from the previous week. For the week ending July 25, DOL reports the advance seasonally adjusted insured unemployment rate was 11%, down from 11.6% from the previous week's unrevised rate.

The national weekly seasonally adjusted initial claims report is one of 10 components in the Composite Index of Leading Economic Indicators. To smooth out the volatility in the weekly initial claims data, a four-week moving average is used to assess trends.

Claimant Resources

Individuals seeking unemployment benefits under the CARES Act should go to <https://ui.ok.gov>

and create an account with the Get Started button to connect their social security number and pull all unemployment information into one location.

Unemployment claimants should be aware that not returning to work when recalled or when work is available could potentially lead to disqualification from receiving unemployment benefits.

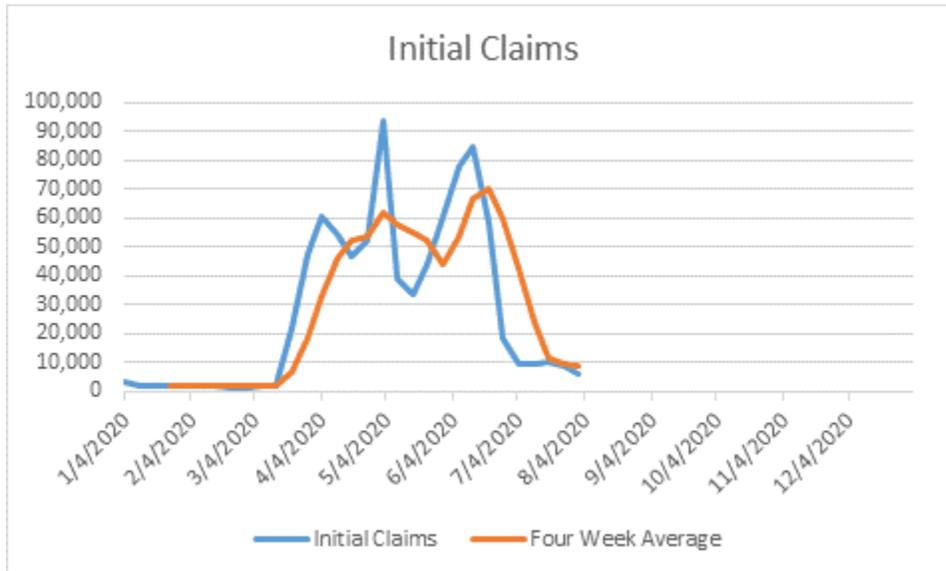
Employers may report this activity by emailing returntowork@oesc.state.ok.us, calling 405-962-7524, or mailing OESC at P.O. Box 52006, Oklahoma City, OK, 73152-2006.

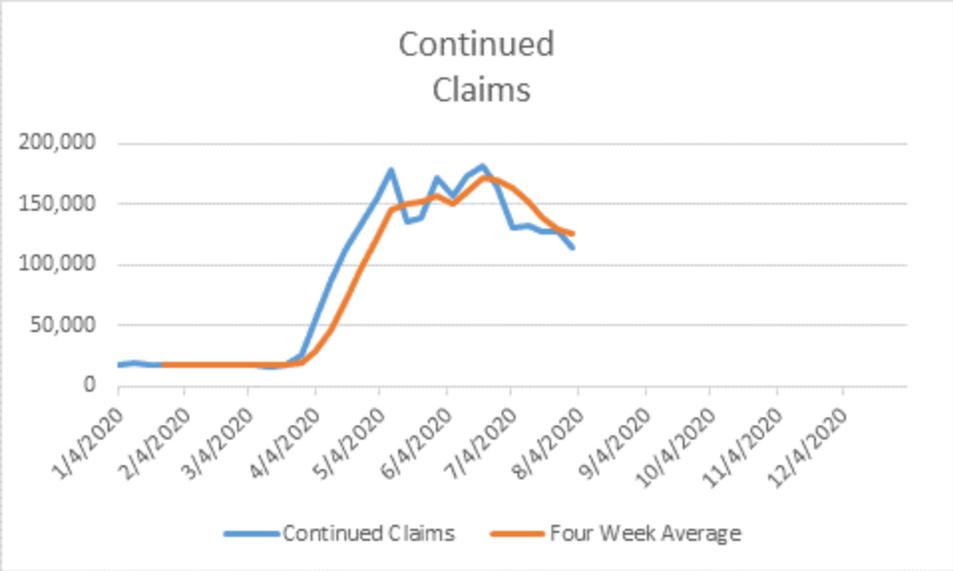
If a claimant returns to work full time, they should keep their unemployment claim open with OESC and not certify a weekly claim. If they return part time, a claimant may continue to certify their weekly claim and must report all gross earnings for the week to potentially receive a partial benefit. Eligibility for continued benefits is determined on the circumstances of each individual claimant.

OESC is an excellent resource for people looking to re-enter the job market by connecting Oklahomans with available employment through <https://okjobmatch.com/>.

If a PUA-eligible claimant reopens their business, they will still receive backdated unemployment benefits to when their COVID-19-related job loss or business closure occurred.

Updated Graphs for Week Ending Aug. 1





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