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OESC Reports $2.8 Billion Paid Out Since March 1
Nearly 800,000 claims processed; initial and continued four-week average down for eighth consecutive week

OKLAHOMA CITY – Since March 1, the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) has paid nearly $2.8 billion in weekly unemployment benefits and processed more than 800,000 claims. Additionally, the latest August unemployment numbers in Oklahoma indicate continued week over week decline — both the initial and continued four-week moving average is down for the eighth consecutive week.

“I am proud of the work my team continues to do during this unprecedented time,” said OESC Interim Executive Director Shelley Zumwalt. “Make no mistake, these are huge numbers, doing the work of a normal year in the span of just a few months. Yes, the situation is on-going, and we are continuing to innovate to meet the high unemployment demand. We’re currently digging into the Lost Wages Assistance approval by FEMA to get that online as soon as possible.”

Lost Wages Assistance Program (LWA)

Earlier this week FEMA approved Oklahoma’s application for the $300 unemployment assistance benefit. Oklahoma was one of the first 10 states to submit the application and to receive approval, as work continues to get Oklahomans the help they need through the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently the program is slated to provide benefits through Dec. 27, 2020 and will provide payments retroactively from Aug. 1.

Implementation of the LWA program is a complex process, which entails establishing a change in denomination from what had been used to execute the previous federal benefit. This means that because funds provided through the LWA program will come from a different funding source, and because of the way the program has been set up so far, extensive work will need to happen within the state’s system. However, Oklahoma is operating within a compressed four-to-five week timeline in order to get benefits to Oklahomans as efficiently and quickly as possible. Oklahoma’s anticipated timeline differs from other states’, which are slated to implement the LWA program in up to 10 weeks.

“Oklahomans still need help and we are pleased to be able to offer this benefit to families across our state,” Zumwalt said. “Our team is working tirelessly to prepare for implementation of this program, which is anticipated to go into effect in a compressed timeline. I’m proud of our state’s efforts to put money in the hands of Oklahomans who need it most.”
Weekly Unemployment Numbers for Week Ending Aug. 15

- For the week ending Aug. 15, the advance number of initial claims, unadjusted, totaled 6,009, an increase of 322 from the previous week’s revised level of 5,687.
- Initial claims’ four-week moving average was 6,808, a decrease of 968 from the previous week's revised average of 7,776.
- The advance unadjusted number of continued claims totaled 117,141, a decrease of 12,830 from the previous week’s revised level of 129,971.
- Continued claims’ four-week moving average was 124,463, a decrease of 2,498 from the previous week's revised average of 126,961.

Nationally, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims during the same period was 1,106,000, an increase of 135,000 from the previous week's revised level, the U.S. Department of Labor reports. The four-week moving average was 1,175,750, a decrease of 79,000 from the previous week. For the week ending Aug. 8, DOL reports the advance seasonally adjusted insured unemployment rate was 10.2%, a decrease of 0.4 percentage point 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. 15