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State unemployment claims down for 11 straight weeks
OESC makes major progress in first-call resolution and LWA approval; paid out $2.95 billion since March

OKLAHOMA CITY — The Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) reports today that initial and continued claims fell for the week ending Sept. 5, marking 11 straight weeks of fewer Oklahomans needing unemployment benefits.

Recent data also shows the agency continues to make strong gains in improving services to claimants, achieving a 61% first-call resolution rate for callers to its claims hotline. This means that 61% more claimants who are calling in to get assistance with their unemployment claim are getting the help they need without requiring further assistance. Additionally, OESC has paid out more than $2.95 billion in weekly unemployment benefits since March 1.

“I’m encouraged by the continuing improvement in unemployment claims, and the work we’re doing internally to adjust to ever-changing circumstances,” said OESC Executive Director Shelley Zumwalt. “We’re continuing to work hard to ensure Oklahomans get their unemployment benefits and have already started seeing some positive impacts from the changes we’ve implemented at OESC over the past few months. Things like increasing call center staff and removing the tiered calling system are directly impacting how we improve first-call resolution and assist Oklahomans who need help. We’re also moving quickly to implement the Lost Wages Assistance program. We’re making progress and we plan to continue to blaze a trail to help Oklahomans.”

Lost Wages Assistance Program Update

Oklahoma has received approval for weeks four and five of the Lost Wages Assistance program from FEMA. The benefit is set to be implemented in Oklahoma in late September.

As of Sept. 9, FEMA and the U.S. Department of Labor notified OESC that the LWA benefit will expire after six weeks - the week of Sept. 5. At this point, states are able to apply for the LWA benefit through its sixth week. OESC has submitted its application for the sixth week of benefits.

“The decision to cap the LWA program at six weeks was made by FEMA and DOL and was announced to states late yesterday,” Zumwalt said. “OESC and the state of Oklahoma have applied for the maximum amount of benefits available. The six-week cap is the same for all states; OESC’s timeline for implementation does not impact the number of weeks Oklahomans
will receive from this benefit. The team is continuing to work tirelessly to implement this program as efficiently as possible in order to get money in Oklahomans' hands."

The LWA program will provide $300 in weekly unemployment benefits to claimants in Oklahoma. Claimants who receive at least $100 in weekly unemployment benefits are eligible. At the time of implementation, claimants will receive a lump sum of the payment through Sept. 5 and retroactively to Aug. 1.

Weekly Unemployment Numbers for Week Ending Sept. 5

Using the four-week moving average, both initial and continued claims declined for the 11th-straight week.

- The advance number of initial claims, unadjusted, totaled 5,251, down 768 from the previous week's revised level of 6,019.
- The less volatile initial claims' four-week moving average was 5,974 for the week ending Sept. 5, down 109 from the previous week's revised average of 6,083.
- The advance, unadjusted number of continued claims totaled 103,903, down 15,668 from the previous week's revised level of 119,571.
- The less volatile continued claims four-week moving average was 117,323, a decrease of 6,517 from the previous week's revised average of 123,840.

Nationally, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims during the same period was 884,000, unchanged from the previous week's revised level, the U.S. Department of Labor reports. The four-week moving average was 970,570, a decrease of 21,750 from the previous week. For the week ending Aug. 29, DOL reports the advance seasonally adjusted insured unemployment rate was 9.2%, an increase of 0.1 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 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 Oklahomans looking to re-enter the job market through the agency’s connections to available employment at OKJobMatch.com, [https://okjobmatch.com/](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 Sept. 5**

![Graph of Initial Claims](image1)

![Graph of Continued Claims](image2)

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