Continued Claims four-week moving average falls for 12th consecutive week; OESC pays $3 billion in benefits

Initial Claims downward streak ends with revision of Sept. 5 claims total

OKLAHOMA CITY — The Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) reports the four-week moving average for continued claims again fell during the week ending Sept. 12, marking the 12th-straight week of declines. Initial claims’ four-week moving average also fell over the same time.

To date, OESC has also paid more than $3 billion in weekly unemployment benefits since March 1, a historic achievement during the pandemic, as it works to help Oklahomans recover economically from the pandemic.

“We’re in a new phase of unemployment with the continued, steady decline of claims,” said OESC Executive Director Shelley Zumwalt. “We’ve now seen an almost equal number of unemployment claims decline from July to now as there were increases from March through June. While we’re quite not back to pre-pandemic levels, we’re seeing more Oklahomans get their unemployment benefits and claims resolved. Despite this decline, we’re continuing to work hard at specific initiatives to further streamline the process and get Oklahomans continued assistance, including technology updates, execution of the Lost Wages Assistance program and fraud protections.”

Additionally, OESC has revised the initial claims total from Sept. 5 to 6,602 from 5,251.

Lost Wages Assistance

OESC has received approval for week six of the Lost Wages Assistance program from FEMA and is on track to distribute LWA funds to Oklahomans by early next week.
FEMA and the U.S. Department of Labor notified states the LWA benefit will expire after six weeks, the week of Sept. 5. The LWA program will provide $300 in weekly unemployment benefits to claimants in Oklahoma totaling $1,800 in benefits for qualifying Oklahomans. Claimants who receive at least $100 in weekly unemployment benefits are eligible. At the time of implementation, claimants will receive a lump sum payment through Sept. 5 and retroactively from Aug. 1.

"We've applied for the maximum benefits available and have been approved for those six weeks," Zumwalt said. "The six-week cap is the same for all states, per FEMA/DOL. We're ahead of many states in terms of implementation, and look to be able to distribute the benefit by early next week. My team is continuing to work tirelessly to implement this program as efficiently as possible to get money in Oklahomans’ hands."

Weekly Unemployment Numbers for Week Ending Sept. 12

Using the four-week moving average, both initial and continued claims declined for the 12th-straight week.

- The advance number of initial claims, unadjusted, totaled 4,735, down 1,867 from the previous week's revised level of 6,602.
- The less volatile initial claims’ four-week moving average was 5,855 for the week ending Sept. 12, down 457 from the previous week's revised average of 6,312.
- The advance, unadjusted number of continued claims totaled 98,380, down 20,339 from the previous week’s revised level of 118,719.
- The less volatile continued claims four-week moving average was 114,796, a decrease of 6,231 from the previous week's revised average of 121,027.

Nationally, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 860,000, a decrease of 33,000 from the previous week's revised level, the U.S. Department of Labor reports. The previous week's level was revised up by 9,000 from 884,000 to 893,000. The four-week moving average was 912,000, a decrease of 61,000 from the previous week's revised average. The previous week's average was revised up by 2,250 from 970,750 to 973,000.

The advance seasonally adjusted insured unemployment rate was 8.6% for the week ending Sept. 5, a decrease of 0.7 percentage points from the previous week's revised rate. The previous week's rate was revised up by 0.1 from 9.2 to 9.3%.

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/.

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. 12**
Continued Claims

- Continued Claims
- Four-Week Average