

Most Recent Update from the Employment Department

Good afternoon,

I wanted to address the number one concern I have heard from you and your constituents this week.Some are going on 8-weeks without hearing from us, are getting confusing messages from us, or are still waiting to receive benefits.

We know that most of those claims are from people who do not qualify for regular unemployment insurance benefits. That means, they do not have enough wages on record, are independent contractors, or maybe they were about to start a new job, but were waylaid due to COVID-19. These are the folks who have been waiting for the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program, through the CARES Act. Many applied prior to the program being implemented. And, as guidance continues to roll out from the US DOL, we must adjust to be in conformance. For example, after 5 pm on April 27, 2020, the eve of our starting the PUA program in Oregon, US DOL issued new guidance with additional requirements about what information is to be provided to people as they qualify for PUA and what information is needed on each weekly certification people file to continue receiving PUA benefits. Additionally, there are technical requirements such as to examine each claim and validate they are not eligible for regular UI, including checking with other states to see if the person has wages in other states that would qualify them for regular UI benefits. We are building programs quickly with initial guidance and adjusting and improving processes as we are given additional iterative instruction and as we respond to customer feedback. Like every other state, that's our only path forward at this point. This is true for FPUC launched early April, for PUA launched April 28, 2020, and for the PEUC we are close to launching (testing now).

The CARES Act created the idea of several new federal programs, including PUA and handed to states the task of implementing those new programs. Each federal program opens the door wider and wider for more people, hundreds of thousands of people, to file a claim for unemployment benefits. Each program creates the necessity to build processes, adjust IT systems, recruit and hire employees, construct and offer training sufficient for brand new employees to help claimants with brand new programs with increasing complexity. All of this takes time.

And, each new program we create follows the same tenant: Get help into the hands of as many people, as quickly as possible. For example, we did this with the Family First Act (redefined available, able, and actively seeking work definitions), FPUC (\$600 weekly benefit), PUA, and soon with PEUC (13-week extension, close to launch). And there are more programs still in the queue, each requiring skilled resources to analyze, create, test, implement, and adjust. And for the programs we have already implemented, there is work to complete to ensure we are in compliance with federal requirements and can provide more information and reporting about how our programs are operating. This work must be done, but we have prioritized first getting help to Oregonians.

Prioritizing in this way creates both good and bad consequences. Most of your constituents are experiencing the good consequence of seeing hundreds of millions of dollars flowing into your communities. US DOL requires us to report on our performance, including accurate data on where the money is going and we are working hard on validating that data as well. And, still there are too

many who have claims that have not been processed or paid out yet. You can be assured, we are focused on those. We know that you are all taking calls about the hardship this is causing. We are, too.

So yes, the wait for some people is going on 8-weeks and for some, the wait continues and continues to be confusing. By prioritizing standing up the federal programs as quickly as possible, prior to being appropriately staffed, while still receiving federal guidance, the sacrifice has been a backlog that remains difficult to resolve. It is true that it is not too much to ask for a simple confirmation of the status of a claim. Or that it would be great if we had enough trained, experienced people to answer all the phone lines we're adding to reduce wait times. It is also true that we have limited time, guidance, and resources to do everything we want to and need to do. However, this is not stopping us from leaning in with full force.

We are truly sorry for this frustrating time and believe me, we are here every day helping as many people as we can, thousands and thousands of people. The team members here are showing up, giving their all, with integrity, focused on helping. Lastly, we thank you so so much for all your efforts to help us get accurate information out to Oregonians and for showing up too, every day for Oregon. Be well, stay well, and thank you. More soon. Jeannine

Governor Brown's [COVID-19 Resources Site](#) for food, housing, health, and other resources

P.S. Want to stay in the know? [Sign up for our email updates](#)

Our Oregon Employment Department [COVID-19 page](#)

Jeannine Beatrice | Deputy Director | **Oregon Employment Department**