



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Feb. 25 Oregon Employment Department Media Statement

Our next media availability is scheduled for 1 p.m., Wed., March 9.

Economic Update

This week, the Employment Department released two new reports summarizing details of Oregon's job vacancies. As rapid hiring occurred in 2021 to replace jobs lost in 2020 during the pandemic, Oregon's [job vacancies](#) rose to record levels. Oregon employers had 97,000 job openings at any given time in calendar year 2021. The need for workers was especially high in the second half of the year.

With record job openings also came record difficulty filling vacancies. Employers categorized nearly three out of four (72%) of their job openings as hard to fill. Unemployment declined significantly during 2021, and employers reported that their primary hiring challenge for nearly half of all hard-to-fill job openings was a lack of applicants. More job listings were

also staying open longer as employers competed for the limited supply of available workers.

Employers raised wages in 2021. The average starting wage offered for job openings was \$19.69 per hour, which was 4% higher than in 2020 after adjusting for inflation.

Overall, the characteristics employers are looking for haven't changed much in the pandemic and recovery; there were just a lot more of them. Most job vacancies offered full-time work schedules, and employers were mostly looking to fill permanent positions. [Job opportunities](#) are plentiful for Oregon workers across all parts of Oregon's economy. Employers reported job openings in more than 430 different occupations.

Report released on potential disparate impacts of identification verification

Last week, the Oregon Employment Department (OED) released [an internal assessment](#) to determine if people claiming unemployment insurance were being negatively impacted by the requirement to verify their identity through software provided through ID.me.

"We have a strong commitment to equity and inclusion at OED. We also do everything we can to prevent fraud and ensure people who have legitimate claims can access the benefits they need," said David Gerstenfeld, acting director of the Oregon Employment Department. "When we started using ID.me, we were aware of concerns that the technology may not be as accessible to everyone we serve. We conducted the internal assessment to identify potential groups of people who may need extra support to complete the identity verification process."

Based on the finding from our assessment we made some of the following improvements:

- Phone recordings in English, Spanish, Russian, and Vietnamese to inform people of the department's work with ID.me.
- Proactive phone dialer campaigns in English and Spanish to remind people to verify their identity with ID.me.
- Live calls to people from department employees who speak the customer's preferred language or use an interpreter to communicate.
- Providing support through local WorkSource Oregon centers to help people verifying their identity with ID.me, including special cell phones people can use in case they don't have one of their own.
- Providing support through local WorkSource Oregon centers to enable staff to assist people in-person who are having difficulty, or who have privacy concerns with using ID.me, to complete the identity verification process without having to use ID.me.

OED works hard to ensure people can quickly and easily access their benefits, but that identity thieves cannot. When a person applies for UI benefits, state workforce agencies must ensure a stolen identity is not being fraudulently used to obtain benefits. Currently, there is not an adequate federal system to conduct identity verification, and there are only a limited number of private businesses that offer these types of services.

Criminals trying to defraud the unemployment insurance system is a continuing problem for OED and other states. When fraudsters use stolen identities to obtain UI benefits, payments can be delayed for people who legitimately file claims. The department also must protect the money Oregon employers pay into the UI Trust Fund to provide those benefits to unemployed workers.

"Going forward, we will continue looking for ways to improve our services, increase access to our services, and offer support for those with language or technology barriers," Gerstenfeld said.

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The Oregon Employment Department (OED) is an equal opportunity agency. Everyone has a right to use OED programs and services. OED provides free help. Some examples are: Sign language and spoken language interpreters, written materials in other languages, braille, large print, audio and other formats. If you need help, please call 971-673-6400. TTY users call 711. You can also ask for help at OED_Communications@employ.oregon.gov.