



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 3, 2022

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# **Oregon Employment Department receives \$4.5 million for equitable access to Unemployment Insurance benefits**

SALEM – Oregon will receive more than \$4.5 million in grant funding from the United States Department of Labor (DOL) to address disparities in access to unemployment insurance (UI). The Oregon Employment Department (OED) will use the grant to provide direct outreach to underserved communities and gather data to identify which communities need more help.

“This grant will help us reach those people who really need our services but haven’t been able to access them,” Acting OED Director David Gerstenfeld said. “It gives us the opportunity to connect with partners who bring a deep understanding of Oregon’s unique communities, to gain invaluable knowledge about how to best serve these communities, and to gather the data that shows us where there are barriers and how to knock them down.”

Gerstenfeld said the grant will enable the agency to build on what it already started during the pandemic. During the surge of unemployment claims,

OED listened to the needs voiced by Oregon's underserved communities and quickly applied strategies that improved access to its much-needed services.

This included partnering with community-based organizations to help people file claims and expanding the amount of information available in languages other than English, including on OED's website.

With the grant, OED plans to create a new business unit called the Equitable Access to Unemployment Insurance (EAUI). The unit will create new materials in additional languages and formats, implement outreach programs for underserved communities, and provide one-on-one guidance services to help people with barriers to using the UI system.

Designed in alignment with the [State of Oregon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan](#), the new program will focus on Native Americans, Latinx, Blacks, Pacific Islanders, Asian Americans, immigrants, people who need assistance in languages other than English, people with disabilities, and those who are economically disadvantaged.

OED will also use the federal funding to analyze data and determine which underserved communities would benefit from future outreach efforts.

Oregon is one of four initial recipients of the DOL grant. "These grants are the first of their kind to advance equity in state unemployment insurance programs," said U.S. Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh. "To become a more robust safety net and economic stabilizer, our unemployment insurance system must serve all workers fairly and equitably."

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden says millions of workers across the country have relied on jobless benefits to make ends meet throughout the pandemic. However, accessing those benefits has been challenging for too many Oregonians. He's grateful the federal government is helping Oregon with its continued efforts to provide aid, equitably.

"While the Oregon Employment Department continues to work tirelessly to get benefits out the door as quickly as possible, I'm gratified to see federal dollars going to help the state address equity issues head-on," he 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](mailto:OED_Communications@employ.oregon.gov).