



Workforce System Response to COVID-19 Clark, Cowlitz & Wahkiakum Counties August 20, 2020

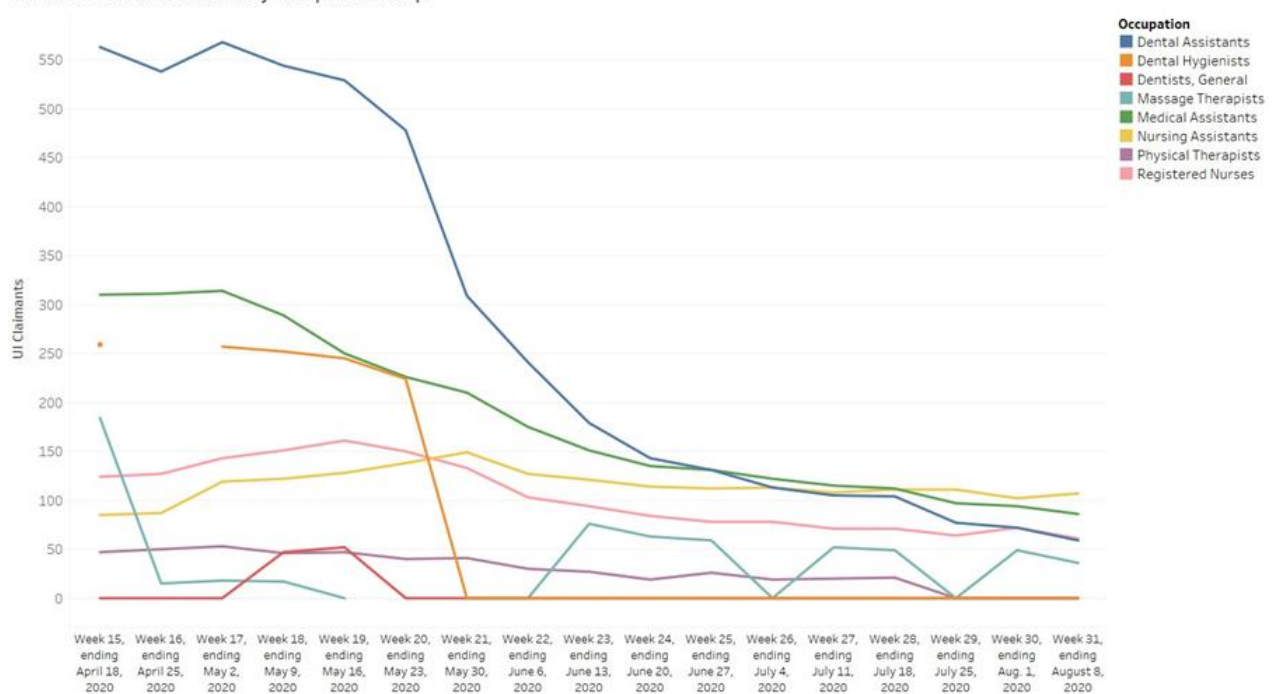
Healthcare Industry Recovering in Southwest Washington

Despite the substantial impacts of COVID-19, the healthcare sector in Southwest Washington is recovering and quickly normalizing as businesses continue to open, unemployed workers go back to work and unemployment insurance (UI) claims continue to drop. Healthcare education programs are successfully offering courses and clinical/externships online and report solid fall program enrollments. And companies are finding new ways to connect with applicants and fill open jobs.

Unemployment Healthcare Workforce Claims Drop Significantly

As employees return to work, continued unemployment insurance (UI) claims have dropped significantly from mid-April high points across all healthcare channels.

SW WA UI Continued Claims by Occupation Group



As an example, at one point, Dental Assistants and Dental Hygienists had two of the highest numbers of initial UI claims. As seen on the graph above, the overall continued UI claims for:

- Dental Assistants have dropped from over 550 in April to 72 the week of August 8
- Dental Hygienist dropped from a high of 253 to 0 during the same time

Using the dental segment as a workforce recovery example, dental offices were closed completely across the state in late March and early April. Dental teams including dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants were immediately out of work. As these offices reopened, the above graph tracks the drop in continuing UI claims. Numbers are approaching pre-COVID-19 levels.

The Clark College Dental Clinic offers a direct example of how healthcare education programs and clinics adapted lab classes and clinic processes to meet safety guidelines prescribed by the Centers for Disease Control, Washington State Department of Health, and American Dental Association to protect students, staff and patients. See article: [Clark Dental Clinic re-opens.](#)

Education and Career Pathways Remain Open

As a result of COVID-19, our higher education and business partners developed new procedures and processes to keep candidates moving through the healthcare career pathways pipeline. Through collaboration between businesses and education, in conjunction with State healthcare licensing agencies, mountains were moved to keep our healthcare programs relevant and current.

PeaceHealth's Summer Nurse Residency program begins this month with a full cohort of newly- graduated Registered Nurses (RN's) being placed in hospitals in Longview, Vancouver, Bellingham and Eugene, Oregon. Initially, there was concern these new RN's would not be able to complete their capstone or clinical senior practicums. Local nursing schools like Washington State University Vancouver, University of Portland, Clark College and Lower Columbia College, quickly came together to build virtual simulation programs addressing the nursing education requirements and ensuring students could graduate on time.

PeaceHealth is taking an additional proactive step in onboarding nurse preceptors to help new RN's fill in any gaps and is considering extending orientation time. PeaceHealth is also part of a national Nurse Residency Program that is actively updating standardized curriculum to support newly graduated nurses and ensure a knowledgeable and ready workforce now and in the future.

Clark College's Medical Assistant (MA) program and the Vancouver Clinic (TVC) continue their partnership in offering 24 externships to graduating MA's this September and October. TVC is

also working with other local school externship programs to support this high-demand position. While COVID-19 stalled externship programs in the short term, safety processes were put in place to ensure students, staff, and clients would be safe going forward. TVC also worked directly with many of these same students on a Personal Protection Equipment distribution project, which gave students some practical work experience as well as an opportunity to connect and network with TVC staff. This solid partnership between educators, students and our local workforce resulted in innovative solutions.

Our education partners continue to develop and promote their healthcare pathways programs online. Clark College is filling upcoming nursing and medical assistant cohorts to capacity. “At this point, we have not noticed a drop in either program,” states Brenda Walstead, Dean of Business and Health Sciences. “We have three nursing cohorts starting each year with 32 students in each cohort. We also have one Medical Assisting cohort starting winter term with 30 students.” With Medical Assisting and Phlebotomy having a new degree option for students, Walstead expects interest in these programs to increase as the Phlebotomy program becomes eligible for financial aid.

While they made switching to online classes appear easy and seamless, a vast amount of time and resources were spent by our higher-educational partners to ensure programs and courses were accessible to students. As many healthcare courses require labs or hands-on participation, internal processes had to be developed to ensure the safety of both students and faculty. Simulation training is becoming more of a ‘norm’ in programs through partnerships with [SIMTICS Online Learning Simulations](#) and [EHR Medical Office Education](#).

Recruiting and Hiring Practices Evolving

As education and training have adapted, recruiting processes are also evolving. “At Legacy Health, we’ve continued to work hard to maintain our recruitment efforts, despite the current pandemic,” said Cathy Reynolds, Legacy’s Director of Employment and Workforce Planning. “From a safety standpoint, we are now conducting interviews by phone or virtual interview using video conferencing, as well as participating in virtual job fairs. We have also been able to maintain engagement with applicants by streamlining our work to improving time to hire, as well as using mostly online onboarding processes.”

Benjamin Surmi, Director of People and Culture at Koelsch Communities, which has multiple senior communities in Longview, Vancouver and other parts of the state, has had similar experiences around recruiting and interviewing: “As in-person interviews get more challenging, many team members have embraced FaceTime as the initial way to meet for an

interview,” said Surmi. “While many supervisors may have felt that method was awkward or too personal, that perception has changed and will likely remain a new default.”

Through innovative processes and procedures, healthcare businesses are continuing to reopen. Career pathways and student engagement processes have morphed beyond the ‘school building’ to include online, real-time and simulation education and hiring practices are evolving to meet the current demand to fill the jobs necessary to support the continued recovery of our healthcare industry.

The workforce system has resources for both businesses and job seekers. Please reach out:

- **Healthcare companies** wanting assistance with your healthcare workforce needs can contact Sean Moore at Workforce Southwest Washington at smoore@workforcesw.org or 360.762.8569.
- **Job seekers** interested in learning about healthcare opportunities should contact Karin LaValla at WorkSource, 360.735.4957, klavalla@esd.wa.gov.

Responding to Business Needs

Manufacturing, healthcare, construction, transportation and tech companies with workforce needs or questions about bringing back furloughed workers, improving skills of existing employees and/or filling open jobs can get assistance by **contacting our [business services team](#)**.

Services for Adults + Youth

Job search optional until September

[Job search requirements](#) for individuals receiving unemployment insurance benefits will remain suspended through Sept. 1. This means the soonest unemployment claimants will be required to actively seek work is Sept. 6.

The requirements were waived in March and the date has been extended several times. [Sign up to get alerts](#) when requirements are updated from the [Employment Security Department](#).

While not required, individuals wanting to look for work can view open jobs at www.WorkSourceWA.com. The WorkSource locations in Vancouver and Kelso are providing services online, through email, virtual meetings and by phone. Get contact information by visiting www.WorkSourceSWWA.com.

Resources

- Layoffs: If you are permanently closing or laying off a majority of your employees, you should [file a Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notice \(WARN\)](#).
- [Links to various COVID-19-related resources](#) for businesses and job seekers.
- The [Employment Security Department](#) has information for businesses and individuals about [returning to work](#) and [refusing to go back to work](#).

Workforce Southwest Washington (WSW) funds services that help individuals gain skills to find good-paying jobs or advance in their careers and help companies recruit, train and retain workers. Our investments strengthen the region's businesses and contribute to a strong economy. Since 2003, we've invested more than \$100 million in Clark, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties. Learn more at www.workforcesw.org. Workforce Southwest Washington | 805 Broadway, Suite 412 | Vancouver, WA 98660