

Fresno County records lowest unemployment rate for December in seven years

By Tim Sheehan



In an August 2014 file photo, Jennifer Deniston, a registered nurse, checks the blood pressure of Johnny Guajardo at PACE Fresno County, a program for chronically ill seniors. Fresno County added 7,600 jobs in 2014, led by the education/health services sector, which added 2,900.

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Three things to know about December unemployment

- Fresno County ended the year with 11% unemployment in December.
- The average annual unemployment rate in Fresno County was 11.4% in 2014.
- California's unemployment rate in December was 7%, while the national rate was 5.6%.

Fresno County's unemployment rate edged down slightly in December, ending the year at 11% and marking the county's lowest December unemployment rate in seven years.

In figures released Friday, the state Employment Development Department reported the number of people working in

the county fell by about 1,800 between November and December. But the number of people in the labor force shrank even more, creating the mathematical dip in the unemployment rate from November's 11.2%. A year ago, the unemployment rate in Fresno County was 12.1%.

The annual average jobless rate for all of 2014 was 11.4%, the lowest annual rate since 2008 when it was 10.5%, said Steven Gutierrez, an EDD labor market analyst in Fresno.

Month-to-month unemployment rates also fell slightly in Kings and Madera counties. The rates for December went up in Merced and Tulare counties.

Employment in most industry sectors was flat in Fresno County last month. Private-sector education/health services grew by 800 jobs, mostly in health services and social assistance. But other industries saw declines, including a drop of 800 jobs in government, 400 in construction, and 200 in farming.

Gutierrez said it's normal to see seasonal swings in sectors such as construction and farm jobs during the winter months, with hiring picking up in the spring as weather improves and agricultural activity resumes.

In year-to-year figures, December represented the 39th consecutive month in which unemployment was lower than it had been a year earlier. Between December 2013 and December 2014, total employment in Fresno County rose by 7,600 jobs. The largest year-to-year growth was in education/health services, which added 2,900 jobs. Professional/business services (composed of firms that provide services for business clients including administrative, waste disposal, legal, scientific, accounting, engineering and technical work) added 1,900 jobs during the year. And construction, one of the hardest-hit industries during the recession a few years ago, continued its slow rebound with 1,200 more jobs than in December 2013.

California's unemployment rate fell to 7% in December, down from 7.2% a month earlier, but the state added few jobs last month. The EDD says the number of non-farm payroll jobs increased by just 700 last month, despite the improvement in the overall rate. The last time California's jobless rate stood at 7% was June 2008, before the recession took hold. The state reported Friday that California has added more than 1.5 million jobs since the economic recovery began in February 2010.

The U.S. unemployment rate is 5.6%, down two-tenths of a percentage point from 5.8% in November, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

This story will be updated.

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