



# King County Labor Area Summary April 2021



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\*Data used in this report available at the web address listed above.

## Overview

- In April 2021, the not seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in King County was 5.2 percent – down from 5.5 percent reported in March. Twelve months ago, the unemployment rate was 15.1 percent.
- The King County labor force expanded by 55,757 or 4.5 percent over the year.
- Nonfarm employment expanded by 6,200 from March to April 2021. There were an estimated 1,395,400 total nonfarm jobs in King County.
- Seven major industries detailed in this report expanded employment over the month and 4 shed jobs. The largest gains were attributable to hiring in leisure and hospitality, while the deepest losses were observed in manufacturing.
- Total nonfarm employment in April 2021 was 81,700 above the level observed 12 months earlier—during the month of peak Covid-19 related job losses. Compared to April 2020, employment was up 6.2 percent over the year.
- Nine major industries detailed in this report expanded employment over the year and two shed jobs. Retail trade and leisure and hospitality added the largest number of jobs since the April 2020 drop. Manufacturing and government each shed jobs over the same time period.

**Important note:** April 2020 was marked by the highest unemployment rates in recent memory. This report, 12 months after the peak of the pandemic employment crisis, shifts the narrative from crisis to recovery.

This report compares the week containing the 12<sup>th</sup> of April with the previous month and year. For all intents and purposes, this is the fourteenth report that addresses the disruption caused by COVID-19 and the social distancing measures put into effect to slow the contagion. Until recently, the most reliable closer-to-real-time indicator has been weekly Unemployment Insurance claims. A supplemental section dedicated to weekly UI claims tracking for King County for the past several weeks is included in this report.

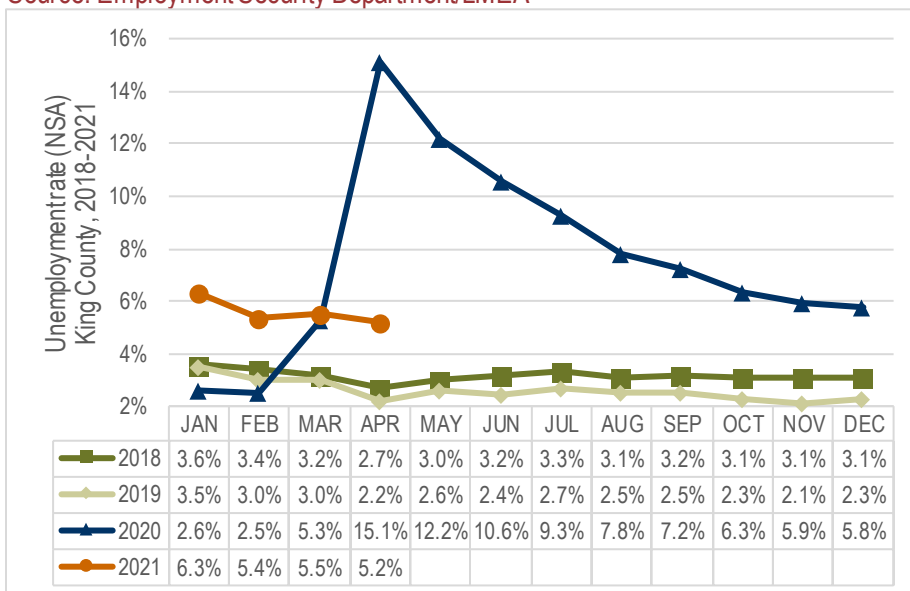
## Unemployment rates and labor force information

The not seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for King County was 5.2 percent (preliminary) in April 2021. This is down from 5.5 percent (revised) in March. The unemployment rate in April 2020 was 15.1 percent.

Circumstances surrounding Covid-19, specifically social distancing measures, took hold in the Seattle area before expanding statewide and much of the nation. A swift and steep spike in unemployment has been declining since April 2020. April 2021 labor force estimates follow:

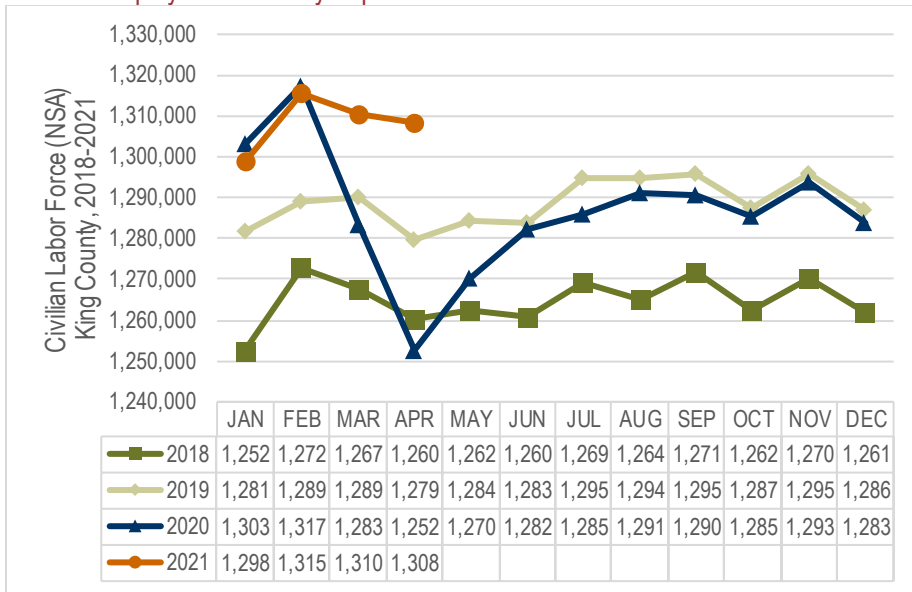
- King County labor force: 1,308,394
- Total employed: 1,240,527
- Total unemployed: 67,867
- Unemployment rate: 5.2%

**Figure 1. Unemployment rates, not seasonally adjusted**  
King County, January 2018 through April 2021  
Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA



King County's unemployment rate has stabilized in the 5 percent range in recent months. Last April, the unemployment rate was 15.1%. Month-to-month, King County's labor force decreased by 2,039 resident workers. The number counted among the employed contracted by 2,631 and the number of active job seekers contracted by 4,670. Over-the-year, the labor force expanded by 55,757 people or 4.5 percent. Within that, the number of employed workers expanded by 176,510 or 16.6 percent and the number of unemployed workers contracted by 120,753 or 64.0 percent.

**Figure 2. Civilian labor force, not seasonally adjusted**  
 King County, January 2018 through April 2021  
 Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA



*The labor force dropped swiftly last year and has been recovering. As of April 2021, the labor force has expanded by 4.5% over the year*

### Washington state

The not seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for Washington State decreased from 6.3 percent (not seasonally adjusted) in March 2021 to 6.1 percent (preliminary) in April. The statewide labor force increased by 19,348 over the month. Within that, the estimated number of employed people expanded by 25,473 and the number of unemployed job seekers contracted by 6,125, pushing the unemployment rate down. Over the year, the labor force is down 45,649 or 1.2 percent. Beneath the surface, the employed labor force expanded by 361,002 or 10.9 percent and the count of unemployed contracted by 406,651 or 62.9 percent. The unemployment rate 12 months ago was a record-setting 16.3 percent.

The preliminary June forecast by Washington’s Economic and Revenue Forecast Council estimates that the statewide unemployment rate averaged 8.41 in 2020, an upward revision compared to the March forecast. The unemployment rate is expected to decrease to an average rate of 5.16 in 2021 and drop to 4.38 percent in 2022, signaling a positive adjustment compared to the March report. See [www.erfc.wa.gov](http://www.erfc.wa.gov) for more information.

### Seattle-Bellevue-Everett Metropolitan Division (MD)

The Seattle-Bellevue-Everett MD combines labor force information for Snohomish and King Counties. King County’s unemployment rate consistently runs below that of Snohomish County. The not seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for the combined MD dropped from 5.7 percent (revised) in March to 5.4 percent (preliminary) in April. Twelve months ago, the unemployment rate was 16.2 percent, as effects of the Covid-19 pandemic showed up in the labor market. The labor force contracted by 3,416 over the month. Over the year, the labor force expanded by 55,787 or 3.3 percent.

### City level estimates

The Bureau of Labor Statistics and Employment Security Department publish labor force information for cities with a population of 25,000 or more. Unemployment rates for selected cities can be found at [www.esd.wa.gov/labormarketinfo/labor-force](http://www.esd.wa.gov/labormarketinfo/labor-force)

## Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claims

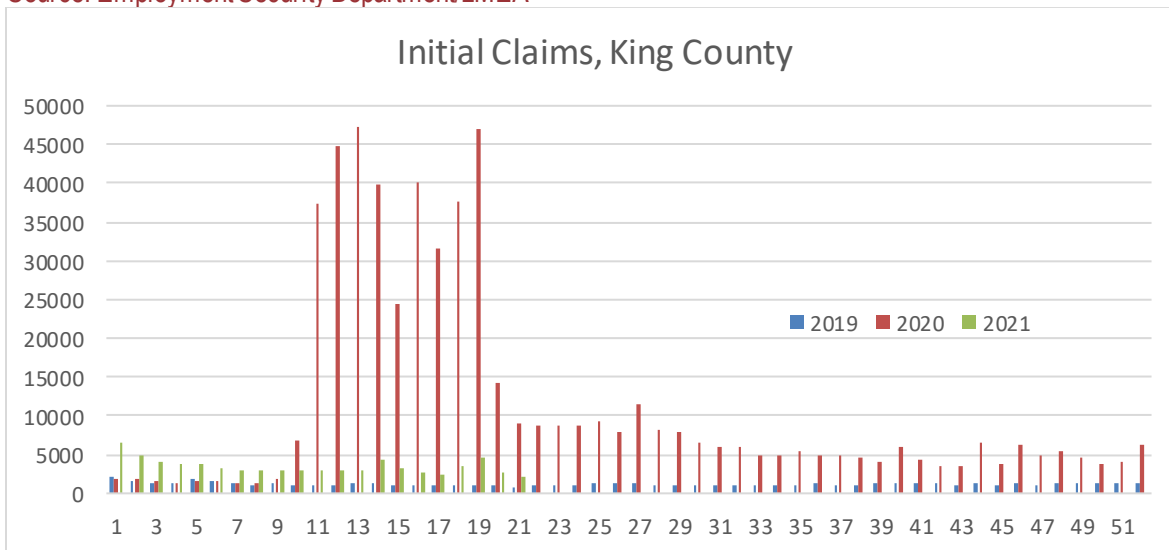
UI claims activity during the Great Recession peaked in May 2009 (49,117 continued claims were counted that month) and were on downward trend that had more-or-less settled out to about 12,000 per month until the arrival of the Coronavirus economy. The wave of claims in April 2020 reached unprecedented levels; 137,755 King County residents filed initial claims and 130,305 individuals collected unemployment insurance that month. In April 2021, 12,204 new claims were filed by King County residents and a total of 28,082 King County residents collected benefits from the state UI system.

### Weekly Initial Claims

In March 2020, the Employment Security Department began publishing weekly counts of initial claims for Unemployment Insurance. Initial claims provide an indicator of layoffs. Because they are entered weekly, they are a bit more nimble than our survey-based datasets.

Although initial claims activity has more-or-less normalized around 3,000 per week, this is still substantially higher than the number of claims that we would have seen prior to the pandemic. For reference, 2,273 applications for regular unemployment insurance were received during the 21st week of 2021. This compares to 8,974 initial claims received during the 21st week of 2020 and 875 claims during the 21st week of 2019.

**Figure 3. Initial Claims for Unemployment Insurance**  
King County, January 2020 through May 2021  
Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA



The week of April 11-17 is the reference week for the labor force and payroll statistics in this report. Weekly initial claims information is published every Thursday.

Weekly claims data can be found here: <https://esd.wa.gov/labormarketinfo>

Additional information can be found here: <https://esd.wa.gov/newsroom/covid-19>

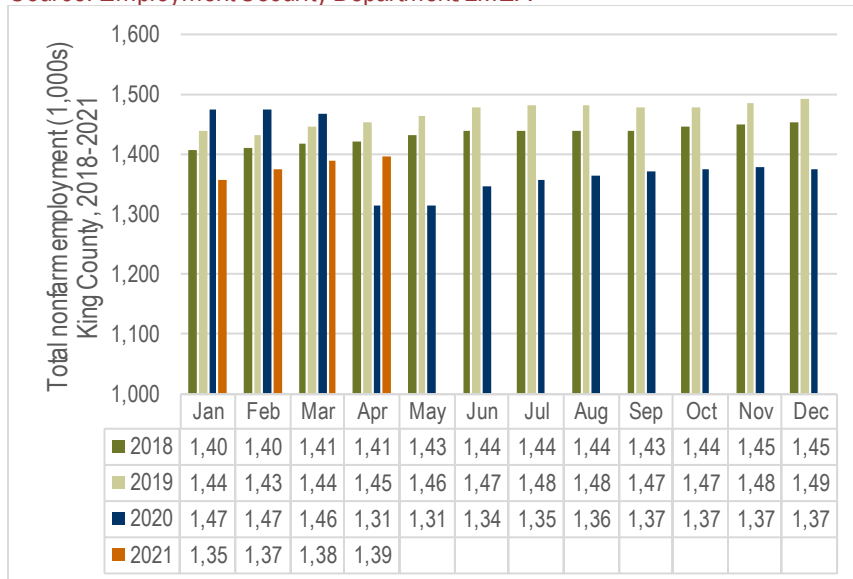
## Total nonfarm employment

Total nonfarm employment (not seasonally adjusted) expanded by 6,200 from March (revised) to April 2021 (preliminary). Over the year, employers in King County collectively recovered 81,700 jobs—up 6.2 percent relative to the Covid-19 related drop in April 2020. The tally of nonfarm jobs in King County was estimated as 1.4 million in April 2021.

**Figure 4. Nonfarm industry employment**

King County, January 2018 through April 2021

Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA



*King County job growth was disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Employment in April 2021 was 6.2 percent higher than in April 2020.*

The Puget Sound area was impacted before other areas in the state and nationally. This report reveals the impacts of Covid-19 and related measures on the local labor market. Specifically, data in this report coincides with the week of April 11-17 on the unemployment insurance calendar (previous section). Because the deep drop in employment occurred in April 2020, this is the first report that shifts the narrative from labor market damage to labor market recovery.

**Figure 5. Total nonfarm industry employment, not seasonally adjusted**  
 King County, April 2020 and March and April 2021  
 Source: Employment Security Department/LMEA

Nonfarm Employment Estimates, Not Seasonally Adjusted

**King County**

Data benchmarked through September 2020

NAICS Industry Title	Prelim Apr-21	Revised Mar-21	Revised Apr-20	Change		
				Mar-21 Apr-21	Apr-20 Apr-21	Apr-20 Apr-21
Total Nonfarm	1,395,400	1,389,200	1,313,700	6,200	81,700	6.2%
Total Private	1,226,400	1,221,600	1,140,200	4,800	86,200	7.6%
Goods Producing	170,100	172,400	159,700	-2,300	10,400	6.5%
Mining and Logging	500	500	400	0	100	25.0%
Construction	81,700	81,400	64,200	300	17,500	27.3%
Construction of Buildings	23,600	23,400	19,600	200	4,000	20.4%
Heavy and Civil Engineering Construction	6,500	6,200	5,600	300	900	16.1%
Specialty Trade Contractors	51,700	51,800	39,000	-100	12,700	32.6%
Manufacturing	87,900	90,500	95,100	-2,600	-7,200	-7.6%
Durable Goods	64,700	66,500	71,700	-1,800	-7,000	-9.8%
Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing	5,300	5,500	6,500	-200	-1,200	-18.5%
Computer and Electronic Product Mfg.	7,000	7,700	8,200	-700	-1,200	-14.6%
Navgtnl., Measuring, Electromed., & Control	4,200	4,300	4,800	-100	-600	-12.5%
Transportation Equipment Manufacturing	34,900	35,100	40,100	-200	-5,200	-13.0%
Aerospace Product and Parts Mfg.	31,700	31,700	37,200	0	-5,500	-14.8%
Nondurable Goods	23,200	24,000	23,400	-800	-200	-0.9%
Food Manufacturing	11,300	11,500	11,600	-200	-300	-2.6%
Service Providing	1,225,300	1,216,800	1,154,000	8,500	71,300	6.2%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	282,500	283,500	257,600	-1,000	24,900	9.7%
Wholesale Trade	61,300	59,500	58,900	1,800	2,400	4.1%
Retail Trade	172,500	174,300	149,400	-1,800	23,100	15.5%
Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers	10,400	10,300	8,900	100	1,500	16.9%
Food and Beverage Stores	24,900	25,100	23,400	-200	1,500	6.4%
General Merchandise Stores	16,600	16,700	15,500	-100	1,100	7.1%
Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities	48,700	49,700	49,300	-1,000	-600	-1.2%
Transportation and Warehousing	46,600	47,700	47,300	-1,100	-700	-1.5%
Air Transportation	13,600	13,300	14,300	300	-700	-4.9%
Truck Transportation	7,100	7,300	6,100	-200	1,000	16.4%
Support Activities for Transportation	10,700	10,600	10,700	100	0	0.0%
Warehousing and Storage	3,200	3,200	3,200	0	0	0.0%
Information	130,700	131,900	126,000	-1,200	4,700	3.7%
Software Publishers	72,800	74,000	71,900	-1,200	900	1.3%
Financial Activities	72,500	71,300	71,900	1,200	600	0.8%
Finance and Insurance	43,400	43,200	42,300	200	1,100	2.6%

Credit Intermediation and Related	16,200	16,100	15,900	100	300	1.9%
Insurance Carriers and Related	19,100	19,100	18,800	0	300	1.6%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	29,100	28,100	29,600	1,000	-500	-1.7%
Professional and Business Services	233,700	234,600	229,200	-900	4,500	2.0%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	138,300	138,300	133,500	0	4,800	3.6%
Legal Services	12,100	12,100	11,600	0	500	4.3%
Accounting, Tax Prep., Bookkpg., and Payroll	9,900	9,700	9,700	200	200	2.1%
Architectural, Engineering, and Related	18,900	18,900	18,700	0	200	1.1%
Computer Systems Design and Related	46,500	46,000	45,800	500	700	1.5%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	29,100	28,900	30,200	200	-1,100	-3.6%
Admin., Support, Waste Mgmt., and Remediation	66,300	67,400	65,500	-1,100	800	1.2%
Administrative and Support Services	62,900	63,800	62,400	-900	500	0.8%
Employment Services	22,000	23,700	21,800	-1,700	200	0.9%
Educational and Health Services	187,900	187,300	172,100	600	15,800	9.2%
Educational Services	30,200	30,300	26,900	-100	3,300	12.3%
Ambulatory Health Care Services	61,100	60,700	53,000	400	8,100	15.3%
Hospitals	29,500	29,600	29,700	-100	-200	-0.7%
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	18,700	18,500	19,000	200	-300	-1.6%
Social Assistance	48,300	48,200	43,400	100	4,900	11.3%
Leisure and Hospitality	101,900	94,200	79,800	7,700	22,100	27.7%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	19,300	16,500	12,600	2,800	6,700	53.2%
Accommodation	7,500	6,500	7,500	1,000	0	0.0%
Food Services and Drinking Places	75,100	71,200	59,700	3,900	15,400	25.8%
Other Services	47,100	46,400	43,900	700	3,200	7.3%
Repair and Maintenance	8,200	8,200	7,400	0	800	10.8%
Personal and Laundry Services	12,900	12,500	11,900	400	1,000	8.4%
Religious, Grantmkg., Civic, Professional, & Similar	26,000	25,700	24,600	300	1,400	5.7%
Government	169,000	167,600	173,500	1,400	-4,500	-2.6%
Federal Government	19,400	19,300	19,300	100	100	0.5%
State Government	50,900	50,800	51,700	100	-800	-1.5%
State Government Educational Services	36,500	36,600	37,300	-100	-800	-2.1%
Local Government	98,700	97,500	102,500	1,200	-3,800	-3.7%
Local Government Educational Services	42,300	41,500	44,500	800	-2,200	-4.9%
Workers in Labor/Management Disputes	0	0	0	0	0	

*King County has recovered 81,700 jobs since April 2020.*

## Nonfarm industry employment

### Goods-producing Industries

From March to April 2021, total employment in goods-producing industries contracted by 2,300, with employment growth observed in construction and losses observed in manufacturing. Year-over-year, goods-producing employment was up 10,400 or 6.5 percent reflecting a substantial rebound by construction offset somewhat by declining employment in manufacturing.

Employment levels in **construction-related industries** expanded by 300 over the month. The tally of jobs in construction was estimated at 81,700. Year-to-year, employment in construction was up 17,500 or 27.3 percent.

- Despite a major temporary setback due to physical distancing protocols in April 2020, King County based employment in construction quickly recovered and surpassed pre-pandemic levels. Recent growth has been concentrated in the largest component of construction; specialty trade contractors added 12,700 jobs over the year.
- Construction is a highly-seasonal industry. While we can expect to see seasonal losses over the winter, a strong real estate market and a boom in home improvement projects is continuing to buoy this set of industries.

**Manufacturing** represents a variety of activities in King County, with products ranging from aircraft, marine and electronic products to food manufacturing. In April, King County-located manufacturing employers collectively shed 2,600 jobs. Over the year, total manufacturing employment was down 7,200 or 7.6 percent. This is largely a reflection of the drop in aerospace that took hold after April 2020.

- The tally of aerospace products and parts manufacturing jobs was unchanged over the month and down 5,500 jobs over the year. The count of aerospace products and parts manufacturing *only* catches those employers that are directly and primarily responsible for manufacturing aerospace products. Other products and services in the supply chain are counted under their best fit industries.
- Employment in nondurable goods contracted by 800 over the month and by 200 jobs over the year.

### Service-providing industries

Service providers represent an extremely diverse collection of sectors. Taken as a whole, service-providing employers added 8,500 jobs in April. Over the year, service providers added 71,300 jobs. The largest one-month increases were observed in leisure and hospitality and wholesale trade. The deepest one-month losses were observed in retail trade. Over the year, retail trade and leisure and hospitality added the most jobs. The only two service industries to have shed jobs relative to April 2020 are government and transportation, warehousing and utilities.

**Wholesale trade** employment increased by 1,800 in April and by 2,400 or 4.1 percent above the employment level observed 12 months ago. Wholesale trade accounted for 61,300 King County-based jobs in April 2021.

Net employment in **retail trade** dropped by 1,800 over the month. Over the year, retail trade employment expanded by an estimated 23,100 jobs (15.5 percent).

- Since April 2020, motor vehicle and parts dealers and food and beverage stores each recovered 1,500 jobs. General merchandise stores recovered 1,100.
- The story of retail trade (especially in King County) goes beyond physical storefronts. Scaling up to the statewide level, “other retail,” a category which includes online retail sales, expanded employment by 27,500 (23.3 percent) over the year.

Net employment in **transportation, warehousing and utilities** contracted by 1,000 over the month and remains 600 jobs below the employment levels observed last April. This set of industries accounted for an estimated 48,700 King County jobs.

- Over the year, air transportation shed 700 jobs (4.9 percent) and support activities for transportation was unchanged. Truck transportation added 1,000 jobs over the year.
- Employment in warehousing and storage remained unchanged over the year.



Employment in the **information** sector contracted by 1,200 over the month but expanded by 4,700 jobs or 3.7 percent over the year. This sector, which includes everything from software publishers to radio stations, newspapers and movie theaters had an estimated tally of 130,700 jobs in April. As a whole, the sector was relatively stable amidst the tumult of the past year.

- The information sector includes software publishing activities. Employment in software publishing contracted by 1,200 over the month but expanded by 900 (1.3 percent) over the year.

The **financial activities** sector includes the finance, insurance, real estate and rental and leasing industries. The overall employment level increased by 1,200 over the month and by 600 over the year.

- Over the year, employers in finance and insurance collectively added 1,100 jobs. Real estate and rental and leasing employment dropped by 500 over the year.

**Professional and business services** includes a variety of professional and technical services such as accounting and engineering services. It also includes administrative support and management services and supports day to day business operations with services such as housekeeping and temporary employment services. In short, these are the businesses that provide operational support to others in the business community. In April, this diverse sector shed 900 jobs. Over the year, professional and business services expanded employment by 4,500 (2.0 percent).

- From April 2020 to April 2021, professional, scientific and technical services added 4,800 jobs (3.6 percent), management of companies and enterprises fell by 1,100 (3.6 percent), and administrative support, waste management and remediation was up 800 jobs (1.2 percent). Employment services was up 200 jobs over the year.

Employment levels in **educational and health services** expanded by 600 over the month. Over the year, this diverse sector recovered 15,800 jobs (9.2 percent). Educational and health services accounted for an estimated 187,900 King County-based jobs in April 2021.

- Healthcare and education is comprised of a diverse set of industries, each of which has been affected somewhat differently in this health crisis. Over the year, private educational services recovered 3,300 jobs. Ambulatory health care services added 8,100 jobs, hospitals shed 200 and nursing and residential care facilities were down 300 jobs. Social assistance added 4,900 jobs over the year.

**Leisure and hospitality** employment grew by 7,700 over the month, following the deepest losses of any industry last April. Over the year, the industries that entertain residents and visitors re-gained 22,100 jobs (27.7 percent), but still has a long way to go.

- Arts, entertainment and recreation added 6,700 jobs and food services added 15,400 relative to April 2020. Accommodations remains at the same levels observed last year.

**Other services** represents a diverse collection of industries that do not fit elsewhere and include employers ranging from religious and grant-making organizations to hair dressers, auto mechanics and dry cleaners to membership clubs. Overall employment levels increased by 700 over the month and 3,200 over the year. Other services represented 47,100 King County jobs in April 2021.

- Each breakout in the monthly report appears to be on the path to recovery.

**Government** employers collectively added 1,400 jobs over the month but shed 4,500 jobs over the year.

- Month-to-month gains were concentrated at the local level (mostly attributable to the expansion of in person learning at local K-12 school districts).
- The deepest year over year losses were observed in local education – with more than half attributable to losses from local education. State government losses were also education related.

## **Forecast information for Washington state:**

The Washington State Economic and Revenue Forecast Council issues quarterly forecasts that address Washington's projected economic health. The preliminary June forecast is currently online at [www.erfc.wa.gov](http://www.erfc.wa.gov).

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