



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH & WELFARE

DIRK KEMPTHORNE – Governor
KARL B. KURTZ – Director

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
450 West State Street, 10th Floor
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, ID 83720-0036
PHONE 208-334-5625
FAX 208-334-5926

NEWS RELEASE

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Ross Mason
(208) 334-0693

**BINGHAM COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$43.7 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Bingham County residents and businesses received more than \$43.7 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 43,000 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Bingham County ranks number 11 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$1,019 for every man, woman and child residing in Bingham County. This includes citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department. The statewide average is \$839 per capita.

The Department distributed \$1.15 billion in 2004 statewide in Idaho communities. These funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, foster care and a variety of other assistance programs.

"This is an investment for all Bingham County residents," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "These are tax dollars put to good use because they are used to help people become healthy and productive. This money goes go to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment for adults and adolescents, improvements and operations at the local hospital, and dozens of other badly needed services."

"This is as much about sustaining communities as it is investing," adds Kurtz. "By providing programs that support people, we are helping communities and their residents build the endurance and strength they need to remain vital. Everyone profits from this investment, not just those who use Department programs. This isn't just me pounding my chest. That's what community leaders tell us."

Bingham County Commissioner Cleone Jolley says, “We need the Medicaid program. I don’t know what we would do if we didn’t have it. (Without Medicaid) the counties would end up helping people without health insurance. The fact that we have this money coming into the county keeps us from getting to far in the hole. I am surprised that there is this much money going into the county.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$36.8 million on health care for residents of the county. A large share of the money goes to drug stores like The Pharmacy Shop in Blackfoot. “These (Medicaid) dollars are huge to our business,” says pharmacy owner Rob Miller. “This makes a big difference in our bottom line. Salary costs for a pharmacist is a big part of our expense. A fill-in pharmacist now costs about \$90-120 per hour.”

The money is equally important at Bingham Memorial Hospital. The hospital received more than \$530,000 in additional payments called Federal Upper Payment Limits and Disproportionate Share because the hospital cares for more Medicaid clients than the average hospital. That money can be used for any purpose, so it has the potential of providing service for any client, not just Medicaid. “This money is very critical because right now we’re on a low payment rate from Medicaid,” says Charlie Button, chief financial officer for the hospital. “The Upper Payment Limits helps with operations. It’s money to pay for nurses and staff and keep our building going.”

The money is in addition to payment for regular services to Medicaid clients. Bingham Memorial received \$2.7 million for inpatient and outpatient care bringing the total Medicaid investment in Bingham Memorial to nearly \$3.3 million in 2004.

Bingham County benefits from State Hospital South in Blackfoot. The Department-run facility spent \$16.8 million in 2004 to house and care for Idaho residents with severe mental illness. “Much of those dollars stay in the county,” says Kurtz. “The facility not only gives quality treatment and care to patients, but provides good paying jobs that support the county’s tax base.”

Bingham County residents received \$3.4 million in Food Stamps to feed their families in 2004. The number of people served increased by 400 and the cost jumped \$400,000 over 2003. The Wal-Mart Supercenter in Blackfoot redeemed almost \$1 million of the total. Store Manager Rex Donahoo says the money is important, besides the fact that they are able to provide the service for their customers.

“Everything that we do is based on our sales,” he says. “Obviously, that million dollars in sales generates quite a few jobs. The more business we do, the larger the store, and the more people we employ. The size of our store is based on sales.”

Donahoo says if they didn’t have that money, “We wouldn’t be able to have as many people working and all the other things that business affects in the county, including state and local taxes.” Wal-Mart has been in Blackfoot for 12 years and selling groceries for five years. Food is about a third of their business. They have 200 employees.

Department spending helps people, and it has an upside for business, according to Idaho economist John Church. “This is not lost money. The spending is an investment. It goes back into the economy. If an employer came to town and spent this much money we would be elated. People need to remember that a big chunk of this is federal money which is a huge return on our taxes. This comes back and helps stimulate the economy and it helps people.”

Kurtz says, “Not only is the Department money a human investment, but it creates jobs and maintains healthy businesses. These dollars recycle numerous times in each community and help us keep the high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho. This is a wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community. The dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe neighborhoods.”

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(Editors: Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director Nick Arambarri at 239-6280 for more information.)

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can be found online at
<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.go>**