



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

**CARIBOU COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$4.3 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Caribou County residents and businesses received \$4.3 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 7,200 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Caribou County ranks number 36 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$608 for every man, woman and child residing in Caribou 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 Idaho communities in 2004. 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 Caribou 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 local hospitals, 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.”

Caribou County Commission Chairman Bruce Dredge says, “The money helps because when that money is spent locally for whatever program the money turns over in the local economy. The spin off is very valuable (to the county) in addition to helping the participants. Obviously, most of the people the Department helps would have to have help from other sources if you weren’t there. If we had to serve (Medicaid) folks through the county indigency fund we’d be in big trouble.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$3.4 million on health care for residents in the county — \$600,000 more than in 2003. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Maughan Pharmacy in Soda Springs. “Medicaid is a big part of our business — about 20 percent — and that’s a big chunk. We’d be hurting if we lost that,” says pharmacy owner Scott Maughan. “I would consider Medicaid an investment in my business. I have a couple of relief people and a tech. The money helps pay for them. Without Medicaid there would be a snow ball effect on our economy.”

The story is much the same at Caribou Memorial Hospital. The hospital received \$188,000 in additional payments called Disproportionate Share and Federal Upper Payment Limits in 2004. These payments are made to some hospitals which have a larger than average share of Medicaid patients. They are in addition to regular Medicaid payments for hospital services and can be used for any purpose, so they have the potential of benefiting anyone who uses the hospital, not just Medicaid clients.

“They’re very important to the hospital,” Hospital Administrator John Hoopes. “Last year we put on a new roof with the money. This year we plan to upgrade our physical therapy building. This is a 35-year-old building that needs lots of work. We need new equipment, too. Without the payments, we couldn’t do these extra things.”

Caribou County residents received \$325,700 in Food Stamps, spending \$189,700 of that amount with grocers in the county to help feed their families, including \$106,400 at Lew & Dan’s Thriftway in Soda Springs. Assistant Manager Leslie Anderson says the money is “very important,” and helps sustain their workforce of 60 full- and part-time 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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investment in every Idaho County
can be found online at
<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**