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NEWS RELEASE

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**CLARK COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$552,000 DOLLAR INVESTMENT
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Clark County residents and businesses received \$552,000 from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 900 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Clark County ranks number 35 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$611 for every man, woman and child residing in Clark 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 Clark 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 and less reliant on government assistance. This money goes to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment, child care so parents can work to support their family, 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."

Clark County Commissioner Michael Leonardson says, “(Department) programs are definitely important to us. The Food Stamp program definitely is a benefit to our county and the people who need the help. If more of that money stayed in the county, it could create a job or two, but we don’t have a full service grocery store. Medicaid saves us on the indigent care costs because people are being served by Medicaid who might otherwise end up using indigent funds.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$441,000 on health care for residents in the county — \$100,000 more than in 2003. Most of those dollars went to nearby counties because there are few health care providers in Clark County. County residents also received \$13,000 from other programs like emergency food and heating assistance, and \$26,000 from the Women, Infants, and Children supplemental nutrition program.

Clark County families received more than \$39,300 in Food Stamps, spending \$30,000 with local grocers to help feed them families, almost all of that at Clark County True Value in Dubois, 47 miles north of Idaho Falls. Night Manager Russ Kerr says those dollars are “extremely important,” representing about 10 percent of the store’s annual income.

A large part of the community receives Food Stamp benefits. “It’s a pretty good chunk of our business,” Kerr says, which helps to sustain their 10 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 Tracey Sessions at 528-5791 for more information.)

**More information on Health & Welfare's
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can be found online at
<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**