



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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 15, 2005

Ross Mason
(208) 334-0693

**GOODING COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$14.8 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Gooding County residents and businesses received \$14.8 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 14,300 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Gooding County ranks number 10 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$1,032 for every man, woman and child residing in Gooding 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 Gooding 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 dependent on government assistance. 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."

Gooding County Commission Chair Carolyn Elexpuru says, “We’re glad to get (Department) money into our county. It’s helpful. We’re thankful for the money that goes into the hospital and the help with daycare. The Food Stamps and WIC are very helpful to those who are not making very much money. And Medicaid helps us keep people out of our indigent program. The indigent program has grown a lot in the four years I’ve been in office. I think the (Department programs) are an investment in our county until we can generate better jobs.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent more than \$13 million on health care for residents of the county — \$1.7 million more than in 2003. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Kendrick Pharmacy in Gooding. “It’s very important to us,” says pharmacy owner Gary Sackman. “Medicaid is steady business we rely on, and the clients rely on us too. Medicaid is about 15-20 percent of our total volume. We have two pharmacists and two pharm techs. Without Medicaid, we would probably have to cut back.”

The story is much the same at Gooding County Memorial Hospital. The hospital received \$156,000 in Federal Upper Payment Limits last year. The money is used to compensate hospitals for low Medicaid reimbursement rates and is very important to hospital operations. “It would be very harmful to lose it,” says Hospital Administrator Vern Carda. The FUPL is in addition to regular payments to the hospital for inpatient and outpatient care for Medicaid clients. All Medicaid payments to the hospital totaled \$399,000.

Gooding County residents received \$652,000 in Food Stamps to help feed their families — \$240,000 more than in 2003. The number of Food Stamp clients increased to 717 in 2004 — 160 more than the previous year. Local grocers received \$252,800 of the total dollars, including Simerly’s in Wendell, which redeemed \$68,400.

Owner Paula Simerly says she’s sure it is important. “Our sales are \$6 million a year, so it represents about one percent. We do double the business in WIC, about \$30,000 in three months.”

While it doesn’t create more jobs, it’s a fair amount of money. “I wouldn’t like to lose that \$60,000, and if you are making 5 percent on it, that is \$12,000 a year. We like it, as you are guaranteed the money, and it is a benefit.”

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.”

###

(Editors: Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director John Hathaway at 316-0620 for more information.)

**More information on Health & Welfare’s
investment in every Idaho County
can be found online at
<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**