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**HEALTH & WELFARE**

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**NEWS RELEASE**

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**LATAH COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$19.5 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT  
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Latah County residents and businesses received \$19.5 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 35,000 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Latah County ranks number 39 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$556 for every man, woman and child residing in Latah 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 Latah 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.”

Latah County Commissioner Jack Nelson says, “These are necessary public programs that help our citizens. The Idaho Child Care Program helps. It enables people to enter the workforce or get back into after having a child. This really benefits the county in rural communities. Look at Medicaid — our indigent care fund is protected and preserved from serious hits. Anytime you can offset costs, it’s good. (Medicaid) is a necessary public program that helps our residents deal with the basic medical services they need.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$16.3 million on health care for residents of the county. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Marketime Drug in Moscow. “(The dollars) are huge to our pharmacy. The margin in a pharmacy is not that great so it’s huge for us,” says pharmacy owner Joanne Milot. “We have one other pharmacist and several techs. This money helps pay their salaries. The services we provide go on and on. It is expensive, but then you see what we’re accomplishing by helping people.”

The story is much the same at Gritman Medical Center. The hospital received an extra payment of \$88,000 last year to compensate for a large number of Medicaid clients. The extra payment called Disproportionate Share (DSH) is in addition to the regular inpatient and outpatient fees paid to the hospital for care of Medicaid patients. The payment can be used for any purpose, so it also has the potential of benefiting anyone who uses the hospital, not just Medicaid clients. “We’re a non-profit hospital, so the extra payment goes back into the hospital for equipment and patient supplies,” says Hospital Administrator Kara Besst. “We are implementing a new system to digitize imaging, and we’re looking at electronic records and clinical documentation.” Besst says the additional payment will help fund these improvements. All Medicaid payments to the hospital totaled \$1.2 million.

Latah County residents also received \$1.6 million in Food Stamps to help feed their families, spending \$1.3 million with local grocers, including Floyd’s Excell Foods in Potlatch, which redeemed \$43,000.

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 adds, “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. Those 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 Dave Reynolds at 799-4338 for more information.)

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