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NEWS RELEASE

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**LEWIS COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$5.6 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Lewis County residents and businesses received \$5.6 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 3,700 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Lewis County ranks number 1 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$1,482 for every man, woman and child residing in Lewis 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 Lewis 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 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.”

Lewis County Commission Chairman Charles Doty says, “I would hope (these programs) are an investment in the county. We’ve gone from a working class to a retirement population. Retired folks often don’t have enough to live on. They need this kind of help. Medicaid really helps, and it takes the pressure off our indigent care fund.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$4.9 million on health care for residents of the county — \$800,000 more than in 2003. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Arnzen Drug in Kamiah. “(Medicaid) is a win-win for everyone. A lot of small rural pharmacies would go out of business without Medicaid,” says store owner Rod Arnzen. “First of all, this (service) is most important to the patient. Medicaid patients are typically high care and high maintenance, so we help them with the meds on a weekly and sometimes daily basis.”

Lewis County residents received \$238,000 in Food Stamps to feed their families, spending \$237,600 with local grocers, including Cloninger’s Harvest Foods in Kamiah, which redeemed \$179,400.

Manager Rich Pomponio says those dollars are “very important. We get business from three counties, Lewis, Clearwater, and Idaho.” He says the money helps keep the jobs they have. If the money was not there, “It would impact us quite a bit,” he says. “Food Stamp customers buy groceries and other things. And we get business from their other income.”

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 Dave Reynolds at 799-4338 for more information.)

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investment in every Idaho County
can be found online at**

<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>