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NEWS RELEASE

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**PAYETTE COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$15.6 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Payette County residents and businesses received \$15.6 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 21,500 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Payette County ranks number 28 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$725 for every man, woman and child residing in Payette 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 Payette 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.”

Last year, the Department's Medicaid Division spent \$12 million on health care for residents of the county.

In addition, Payette County paramedics received a \$15,800 Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Grant to purchase a new defibrillator and provide training. A defibrillator aids paramedics in reviving someone whose heart has stopped and also serves as a monitor for a variety of heart functions. "This is huge that the state can offer these types of grants," says Paramedic Supervisor Rick Watkins. "The (defibrillator) replaced one of the older items. It is absolutely an important piece of equipment. We've had two training grants in the past. We're trying to get an ambulance (through the EMS Grant)."

Payette County residents received \$2.1 million in Food Stamps to help feed their families, spending \$588,118.36 with local grocers, including \$48,213 at Lonnie's Market in Payette. Owner/Manager Lonnie Tuckness says Food Stamp receipts are "very important. The first week of the month when those benefits become available, it is 25 percent of our business."

Food Stamp receipts account for about five percent of the store's annual income, he says. There are 15 to 20 employees, depending on the season. "If we didn't have this money, I would have to cut at least two people," Tuckness says. "If the volume of business goes down, you have to cut back inventory and possibly hours that you are open. You would get by, but it would be a lot tighter."

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 Randy Woods at 455-7102 for more information.)

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