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NEWS RELEASE

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**VALLEY COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$5.3 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Valley County residents and businesses received \$5.3 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 7,700 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Valley County ranks number 30 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$679 for every man, woman and child residing in Valley 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 Valley 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 go to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment for adults and adolescents, improvements and operations at local hospitals, 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."

Valley County Commissioner Thomas Kerr says, “These programs are extremely important. They cut down to the grass roots level. The Food Stamp program helps a lot of families. The home energy program is extremely important — getting heat to people who need it. The child care program is a good program that helps the working poor. We have a boom economy on side that has a bust side to it. These programs help with that. Medicaid is really helpful. It also takes some of the pressure off the county’s indigent care fund.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$3.9 million on health care for residents of the county. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like McCall Drug. Store owner Mike McGee is selling the pharmacy this spring after 18 years of serving Medicaid and other customers in Adams and Valley counties. “Medicaid has been about 15-17 percent of our business. A substantial part of our business is from Medicaid customers in Adams County. Medicaid customers have less mobility, so we pay out of our own pocket to get these drugs delivered there. They depend on providers to come to them when they can.”

The story is much the same at Valley County’s two hospitals; McCall Memorial and Cascade Medical Center which received \$350,000 in extra payments called Federal Upper Payment Limits last year. The payments are in addition to inpatient and outpatient fees paid to the hospital for treatment of Medicaid clients. This program compensates hospitals for low Medicaid reimbursement. The extra money can be used for any purpose so anyone using the hospital can potentially benefit from those dollars.

It makes a difference in just keeping our doors open. It just really makes a difference for us,” says Hospital Administrator Kay Garcia of Cascade Medical Center. “It went straight into operations. I would like to tell you that we are stable enough to do something special with it, but we’re are very cash strapped, so we look forward to this check each year.” All Medicaid payments to the two hospitals totaled \$1.3 million.

Valley County residents received \$590,000 in Food Stamps to help feed their families and another \$73,100 from the Women, Infants and Children nutrition program. Food Stamp spending in the county increased by \$300,000 in 2004. The number of people served totaled 360 — an increase of 40 over the previous year.

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 Kathleen Allyn at 344-6747 for more information.)

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