



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

**WASHINGTON COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$10.1 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Washington County residents and businesses received \$10.1 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 10,000 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Washington County ranks number 13 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$1,014 for every man, woman and child residing in Washington 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 Washington 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.”

Washington County Commission Chair Diana Thomas says, “It absolutely is an investment. These programs provide a lot of help. We have a lot of folks who are low income and a lot of senior citizens. A lot of that money goes to our seniors. It’s a big help. These programs are a lifeline for some these people. Medicaid has helped with our indigent care. We’re trying to develop some ways to help these people before they develop serious medical problems. We may be able to provide some preventative primary care.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$8.4 million on health care for residents of the county. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Park Vu Pharmacy in Weiser. “Medicaid is probably 40 percent of our business,” says store owner Darrel Henrichs. “There’s a lot of people who need (this help) and deserve it, and there’s a few that don’t, but its money well spent. I think this is an investment in the community.”

The story is much the same at Weiser Memorial Hospital which received \$237,000 in extra payments called Federal Upper Payment Limits and Disproportionate Share last year. The payments are in addition to inpatient and outpatient fees paid to the hospital for treatment of Medicaid clients. These programs compensate 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’s important to us. We always use it,” says Hospital Administrator Anne Oglevie. “We write off about 38 percent of what we bill, so sometimes the (payments) go straight into operations. I’d hate to do without that money. We’re trying to build a new hospital. This one is 55-years-old. It’s cheaper to build a new. We’re trying to build a business, so the revenue is critical.” All Medicaid payments to the hospital totaled \$838,000.

Washington County residents received \$786,000 in Food Stamps to help them feed their families and another \$143,000 from the Women, Infants and Children nutrition program. Food Stamp spending in the county increased by \$70,000 in 2004. The number of people using the Food Stamp program totaled 934 — an increase of 160 people over 2003.

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 Randy Woods at 455-7102 for more information.)

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