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NEWS RELEASE

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**ONEIDA COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$3.5 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Oneida County residents and businesses received \$3.5 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 4,100 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Oneida County ranks number 20 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$840 for every man, woman and child residing in Oneida 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 Oneida 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."

Last year, the Department's Medicaid Division spent \$2.9 million on health care for residents of the county — \$400,000 more than in 2003. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Allen Drug in Malad City. "We've got 10 or 11 employees that we support and Medicaid is part of that," says owner Richard Allen. "There are more and more Medicaid customers all the time. We're important here because a round trip to the nearest pharmacy is about 90 miles. Business is business and anything, including Medicaid, that generates revenue, tends to stay in town. These dollars get re-circulated."

The story is much the same at Oneida County Hospital. In addition to regular fees for inpatient and outpatient care, the hospital also received \$160,000 in extra payments called Federal Upper Payment Limits and Disproportionate Share. 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, not just Medicaid clients.

"This money is very important. It mostly goes to technology and some goes to salaries," says Hospital Administrator Todd Winder. "It's like Christmas every year when we get it. We will get a new CT scanner in about a year and that is helping us pay for that. Without the money we would have to delay capital purchases. It's been a real life saver for small hospitals.

Oneida County residents received \$149,000 in Food Stamps to help feed their families. That money served 180 people — 30 more than 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 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. 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 Nick Arambarri at 239-6280 for more information.)

**More information on Health & Welfare's
investment in every Idaho County
can be found online at**

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