



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH & WELFARE**

DIRK KEMPTHORNE – Governor  
KARL B. KURTZ – Director

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR  
450 West State Street, 10<sup>th</sup> 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

**OWYHEE COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$7.3 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT  
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE**

Last year, Owyhee County residents and businesses received \$7.3 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 11,200 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Owyhee County ranks number 32 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$657 for every man, woman and child residing in Owyhee 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 Owyhee 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."

Owyhee County Commission Chairman Harold Tolmie says, “(Department programs) are quite important to Owyhee County’s businesses and tax base. We certainly consider it an investment. Without Medicaid our indigent care fund would be out of sight.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$5.5 million on health care for residents of the county. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Homedale Drug. “Medicaid is a third or more of our business,” says pharmacy owner Rodney Roe. “We are the only pharmacy in Owyhee County. Everybody relies on us, not just the people using Medicaid. We’re pretty important to the community and becoming more important with the increasing gas prices and increasing number of elderly residents. If we lost Medicaid, we probably would come close to closing.”

Owyhee County residents received \$1million in Food Stamps to help feed their families — \$100,000 more than in 2003. The number of people using Food Stamps increased to 1,100 in 2004 — 100 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.”

###

(**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>**