

Idaho Press Tribune, Monday, May 3, 2010 – Staff report

State will trim, nix some aid

Cuts will affect 9 percent of people enrolled in disability program

TREASURE VALLEY — In order to meet a \$1.1 million deficit in a cash assistance program, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare is reducing or eliminating payments to roughly 1,250 Idahoans who meet certain criteria.

Officials said the reduction affects about 9 percent of people participating in the Aged, Blind and Disabled program, which pays monthly cash assistance to participants.

“We regret having to take these actions, but we simply do not have the funds to continue the program at the current level,” says Russ Barron, administrator for the Division of Welfare. “We carefully looked at all types of assistance offered by the AABD program to determine what payments could be trimmed to meet our reduced ... budget and better align Idaho’s program with other states.”

The program provides cash assistance to individuals who are 65 or older, blind or have a disability. Eligible individuals receive a certain amount of cash each month to help pay for everyday living expenses.

Most Idaho recipients will continue to receive a cash payment of \$53 a month.

More than 14,700 Idahoans receive cash payments through the Aged, Blind and Disabled program, which has grown more than 40 percent in the last 10 years.

State officials said that, compared to other states, Idaho has provided some of the most-generous cash assistance benefits, with all of the payments funded by state dollars.

Given the current budget situation, Health and Welfare officials said, the state cannot continue current payment levels to the growing number of participants.

Without this change, the program would grow by a projected \$500,000 of state general funds annually. The program is expected to cost \$9.1 million this fiscal year.

The agency said payment reductions range from \$33 a month to almost \$200 a month. The most significant change is for about 300 participants with developmental disabilities who live in certified family homes. This group will no longer receive \$198 a month in AABD payments, although they will continue to receive their Social Security Income payments of approximately \$674/month as well as medical coverage through Idaho’s Medicaid program. All Medicaid benefits will remain the same, officials said.