

Twin Falls Times News, Friday, July 24, 2009 – by Jared Hopkins

T.F. Co. indigent care costs spike upward

The cost of indigent health care to Twin Falls County continues to outpace historical trends, and the number of cases has grown to the point that the county has tentatively budgeted 25 percent more funding for next year.

Both the total number of indigent cases and how much the county pays out is again on track to surpass the previous year. With just over two months left in the fiscal year, 783 cases have been filed, according to Twin Falls County Clerk Kristina Glascock. Last year there were 819 in the entire fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30.

As a result, with the rising costs and a new law, the county has tentatively increased the indigent budget by 25 percent. Officials are hopeful the \$3.74 million will be enough. This year, the county has already spent \$2.76 million.

Indigent health care is emergency health care provided to people without insurance that addresses a wide range of needs, including mental health. Its administration can often be a cumbersome process that involves appeals and various challenges.

Glascock and Twin Falls County Commissioner Terry Kramer said the increased costs and caseload are due to the rising cost of health insurance, general health care costs and the economic downturn. There are residents in the county who can't afford health insurance, including those who are employed, they said.

"Most of the people we see don't have any health insurance, so I'm sure the rising cost of health care has something to do with it," Kramer said. But, he said, "I think what we're seeing is more people who don't have the money or don't have the job that has the health insurance."

While claims are submitted to the counties, which cover the first chunk, they hand the rest to the state's catastrophic health care program. The 134 cases that have gone to the state's Catastrophic Health Fund has already passed last year's 118.

But on July 1, the county's share of CAT payments increased to \$11,000 from \$10,000 due to a new law passed by the Legislature. That bill, drafted by Sen. [Dean Cameron](#), R-Rupert, and Rep. [Fred Wood](#), R-Burley, was designed to save the state money in the long-term.