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## **State's Food Stamp Participation Rises by 11,734 Families in 12 Months**

*Santa Fe, New Mexico – February 5, 2002* – Families receiving food stamps in New Mexico have increased to 73,540 in the first month of 2003. This is an increase of 1,045 from last month (1.4 percent) and an increase of 11,734 (19 percent) from a year ago. The last month food stamp cases were higher was over five years ago, in April 1997, when they were at 74,579. One in ten people living in New Mexico is receiving food stamps.

Easing food stamp eligibility rules for vehicle ownership, less required visits to offices and a rising unemployment rate (5.9 percent in November 2002) are three reasons the department believes food stamp participation is growing. The average families' food stamp benefit is \$205, which can be used to purchase food products at most grocery stores.

The number of families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), a program that provides financial aid to needy families with dependent children, remained unchanged in January 2003 from the previous month, rising only by four cases, to 16,472. Families receiving TANF decreased by 1,020 from a year ago, down from 17,492 cases (5.8 percent).

Medicaid participation grew to 391,417 people in December 2002. Of these, 258,335 were children. Medicaid participation increased by 3,572 from the previous month (November 2002) and by 44,621 (11.4 percent), from December 2001. Medicaid provides healthcare to lower income children and poor and disabled adults.

The state Human Services department helps more than 600,000 New Mexicans each month improve their well being by delivering an important array of support services for low income and needy families.