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**For Immediate Release**

## **Human Services Department is Prepared to Help New Mexicans During Difficult Economic Times**

### **Larger Income Support Offices Have Changed Customer Service Approach to Meet Growing Demands for Services**

*Santa Fe, New Mexico* – The New Mexico Human Services Department wants New Mexicans to know about the many services available to help make ends meet during difficult economic times.

“The Human Services Department’s mission is to reduce the impact of poverty on people living in New Mexico,” said Pamela Hyde, “There are many services available to help families put nutritious food on the table, pay bills, keep their home warm in the winter, and cool in the summer, and provide health coverage for children.”

The department’s Income Support Division has steadily seen increased activity at offices across the state. Participation in the Food Stamp program has seen the largest growth with 18.5 percent more families participating compared to the same time one year before. In December 2008, there were more than 268,000 people in 109,000 families participating in the Food Stamp Program, bringing in \$29 million in federal dollars each month to New Mexico’s economy.

“Participating in the Food Stamp Program not only helps families make ends meet, but also brings in federal dollars to communities across the state,” said Secretary Hyde. “Last budget year more than \$260 million was spent in local grocery stores through food stamp participation.”

It is estimated that every five dollars in food stamps turns into \$9.20 of economic activity. The average food stamp case consists of about two to three people, and, on average, a family receives \$238 per month.

In an effort to better assist customers at some of the busiest ISD offices across the state a new “Team” approach has been implemented. “Previously, those approved for programs like food stamps were assigned one caseworker who did everything from A to Z for the family,” said Katie Falls, HSD Deputy Secretary. “Now people walking in the door are met by one or more greeters

whose job it is to immediately determine what the visitor needs and then get him/her to the right program or ensure applications for assistance get expeditiously routed.”

Other income and medical assistance programs are also seeing an increase in participation statewide. Below is a summary of the HSD programs available to New Mexicans and who may qualify based on income and family composition.

**Food Stamps.** On average people receiving food stamps are receiving \$238 per month in benefits, which means some receive more and some receive less depending on family size and income. A family of three earning less than \$22,884 should qualify for this program.

**Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).** Unlike food stamps, TANF offers cash assistance averaging of \$447 per month for a family of three and employment programs and supports. Those qualifying for TANF probably also qualify for food stamps and Medicaid. Participation, however, is restricted to families with dependant children earning little or no money. For example, a family of three earning less than \$14,964 would probably qualify for TANF. About 15,821 families are receiving TANF benefits.

**Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).** The LIHEAP program helps low-income families pay heating or cooling costs with a once-a-year benefit. The benefit can be used to help pay gas; electric; or bulk fuels, such as propane, firewood or wood pellet bills. This year’s average benefit per family is \$309. A family of three earning up to \$26,400 can qualify for this program. There are 65,960 families participating in this program.

**Medical Assistance.** The Medical Assistance Division offers several health coverage options for children, some adults, some elderly and people with disabilities. The number of individuals receiving health care through a Medicaid and *Insure New Mexico!* Solutions total more than 450,000 people, about 300,000 whom are children. Income levels vary throughout the many program options.

People wanting more information about the above income support programs should call 1-888-473-3676 or visit our website to find the office nearest your home <http://www.hsd.state.nm.us/isd/>.

People interested in health coverage through the Medicaid program or other *Insure New Mexico!* Solutions can call 1-888-997-2583 or visit <http://www.hsd.state.nm.us/mad/> or [www.insurenemexico.net](http://www.insurenemexico.net).

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