

Waldo County Reports Reduced Health Insurance Costs and a Successful Wellness Program

The Waldo County Commissioners are very pleased to report that the County's 2014 budget is 2.20% lower than the 2013 budget, due in large part to the success of the County's self-funded health insurance plan through Meritain Health. The County implemented this plan in 2008 in order to meet the health care needs of the county employees while curbing costs related to providing health care benefits.

At a time when health plans are in turmoil and costs are increasing for most government entities and private businesses, Waldo County's plan costs have actually decreased. The coverage has remained essentially the same as the standard plan the County was enrolled with prior to becoming self-funded. The health insurance budget still sits below the 2008 budget. The premiums have only increased once since the plan started.

The Commissioners attribute some of the recent health plan cost savings to the success of the Waldo County Wellness Committee and Waldo County Wellness Program, which started in 2012. Over one-third of the Waldo County employees have enrolled at local fitness centers with matched funding from the County health plan. Twice a year, the Wellness Committee prepares and delivers "wellness baskets" to each employee in the county departments. These spring and fall baskets/bags contain small inexpensive items that promote good health, such as healthy snacks, local walking trail maps and pedometers to track how many steps employees are taking. In 2013, nearly half of all employees took advantage of a \$50.00 reimbursement for purchasing fitness-related equipment. The Human Resources/Payroll Director also sends out quarterly newsletters to employees. "Waldo County Employee Health Beat" features short but informative current health and fitness related articles.

With the assistance of these health-focused measures, many of the Waldo County employees have started and continue to participate in regular exercise, have successfully maintained weight loss, and have improved their nutritional habits.