

Health group to assist county

By Jackson Holtz, Everett Herald Writer

Published: Wednesday, August 2, 2006

EVERETT - The Snohomish County finance committee heard an update Tuesday on its \$33,000 investment in the **Puget Sound Health Alliance**. The county joined the alliance last fall as part of an effort to provide employees with better health care and to control cost increases, finance director Roger Neumaier said.

The county spends more than \$25 million on health-care costs each year for its 2,800 employees, Neumaier said. Any tool that helps the county save money is welcome, he said.

Founded in 2004, the alliance is made up of 110 employer groups, insurers and health-care providers. Snohomish, King and Pierce counties are members, along with Washington state, the city of Everett, Boeing and many other public and private employers in Washington. The Everett Clinic also is a member.

Alliance executive director Margaret Stanley told the council her organization is working on several reports that provide guidelines and recommendations on specific medical issues. In the next few months, the alliance will meet with Snohomish County officials to review those reports, Stanley said. As a result, the county is likely to make subtle changes, such as recommending employees use generic drugs when available or adopt healthier habits.

In June, the county hired a wellness coordinator who will organize health fairs, on-site screening programs and other programs. That effort will work in tandem with the alliance recommendations, Stanley said.

Neumaier said County Executive Aaron Reardon is recommending the County Council approve a three-year extension of its contract with the alliance. That motion will come before the council in the next month.