
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

WIC's goal is to improve the health of low-income pregnant women, breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding postpartum mothers, infants, and children up to their fifth birthdays. WIC provides supplemental foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health care and other social services. Participants redeem vouchers at contracted retail stores for specific foods that contain nutrients frequently lacking in the diet of low-income mothers and children.

WIC effectively improves the health and nutrition of mothers, infants, and children. Women who participate in WIC during pregnancy are more likely to have infants with higher birth weights and less sickness in the first weeks after birth than low-income women who do not participate. WIC children are more likely to receive needed health services and experience overall improved nutrition, health, and cognitive development.



Community Involvement

- Does your community have active programs of public information, enrollment assistance, and service to low-income pregnant women and families with children about their potential eligibility for WIC benefits?

- Are systems in place to refer potentially eligible pregnant women to WIC during early months of pregnancy?
- Do physicians in your area know about WIC and regularly refer their patients who are pregnant to the program?
- Do agencies in your community that serve low-income populations regularly refer potentially eligible participants to WIC?
- Is there a widely publicized toll-free number that people in need can call for WIC information and assistance?

Active community involvement is critical to identify, inform, and reach out to people who may need and qualify for WIC benefits, especially women in their early months of pregnancy. Early prenatal care, including WIC, can improve pregnancy outcomes. Some people may not be aware of their potential eligibility and the help that WIC can provide. Some may not know how or where to apply. Active community involvement in public information, enrollment assistance, and service can overcome these barriers.

Local Office Functions

- Does the WIC office accommodate the needs of all clients by providing lunch time, evening, and weekend hours?
- Does the WIC office have satellite clinics for enrolling participants and issuing benefits several times a month in remote areas or areas where participants receive other services in the community (e.g., worksite child care, Head Start, or health care centers)?
- What accommodations are made for those participants who are physically unable to appear at a clinic?

Flexible office hours, locations, and scheduling policies are indicators of a high-quality WIC program. WIC clinics should have procedures in place to allow a proxy to attend a WIC appointment for a homebound or employed participant. Some WIC clinics have even been able to make home visits to people with disabilities.

Enrollment Assistance

- Does the WIC office take advantage of available medical information or provide the applicant with a medical data referral form to streamline the enrollment process?
- Does the WIC office provide certification materials upon request and inform applicants ahead of time of what will be needed to complete their certification?
- Does the WIC office promptly certify participants regardless of whether they call or walk in to the clinic?

WIC offices should try to certify participants in the most efficient and effective way possible. This may mean sending out portions of the certification paperwork to applicants so that they can complete it ahead of time. WIC clinics should try to make appointments for employed participants at times that accommodate their working hours. Using previously acquired medical data can streamline the application process. All WIC applicants must be certified or notified of their ineligibility within 10 to 20 days. Ideally, applicants should be certified on the day of their request.

Referrals

- Does the WIC office regularly make referrals to other nutrition, health, and social service programs? **REQUIRED**

- Does the WIC office actively refer all clients who don't have health insurance to Medicaid or the State's Child Health Insurance Program? **REQUIRED**
- Does the WIC office screen immunization records and refer clients who are not up to date on their vaccinations?
- Does the WIC office work with social services to certify foster children who are less than 5 years of age?
- Does the WIC office work with homeless shelters and food banks to inform homeless women, infants, and children of their potential eligibility for WIC?
- Does the WIC office regularly screen for drug and alcohol abuse and make referrals or provide information on assistance for those in need? **REQUIRED**

Appropriate referrals can streamline the application process and help people locate and participate in all programs for which they are eligible. Homeless people may not realize that the WIC office can work around their lack of access to an adequate water supply, refrigerator, or cooking equipment. WIC offices can form agreements with other health and human service organizations to ensure they share the information necessary to enable clients to apply for all the health and nutrition programs for which they are eligible.

Service to Non-English Speaking People and Migrants

- Does the WIC office provide program information in appropriate languages to migrants and others who do not speak English? **REQUIRED**
- Does the WIC office inform participants that receiving nutrition assistance through WIC does not make an immigrant a public charge?

Some immigrants may be under the mistaken impression that participation in WIC is the same as welfare and could affect their application for citizenship. Immigrants to the United States will not be deported, denied entry to the country, or denied permanent status due to the receipt of WIC benefits. The local WIC office can also inform migrant and immigrant women and families with children of their possible eligibility for WIC in languages they understand.



Nutrition Education

- Does the local WIC office provide effective nutrition education and counseling to participants? **REQUIRED**
- Does the WIC office work with other nutrition education services, such as the university extension office, to maximize opportunities for providing information and education to participants?

Because proper nutrition is important to healthier babies and children, Federal rules require WIC local agencies to hire trained individuals to provide nutrition education and counseling to participants.

Breastfeeding Promotion and Support

- Does your community use the local WIC staff as a resource for information on breastfeeding promotion and support?
- Does your community encourage new mothers to breastfeed and support them if they return to work or school?

Many people recognize the benefits of breastfeeding—including faster recovery from pregnancy and increased immunity passed from mother to baby. But barriers can prevent some women from breastfeeding. WIC participants should receive counseling and information on how to breastfeed and the benefits of doing so.

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- ▶ Visit your local WIC office to learn more about their services and obtain information to share in other areas of the community.
- ▶ Work with the management of the local WIC office to stress the importance of access to WIC services through lunch, evening, and weekend hours.
- ▶ Encourage women to seek prenatal care and apply for WIC as soon as they are aware of their pregnancies.
- ▶ Join a breastfeeding coalition or task force, such as La Leche League, to learn about and help promote successful breastfeeding.
- ▶ Encourage designation of a breastfeeding and pumping room in your office building to create a family-friendly workplace and foster better health for both mother and child.

FNS CAN HELP:

- ▶ More information on WIC is available at www.fns.usda.gov/wic.
- ▶ Call your local FNS Regional Office for a camera-ready copy of *How WIC Helps*.
- ▶ Call Best Start at 1-800-277-4975 for information on breastfeeding promotion and support.