

**SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)
ELIGIBLES AND COVERAGE – 2012: NATIONAL AND STATE-LEVEL ESTIMATES SUMMARY**

Background

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides food, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to health care and social services to nutritionally at-risk, low-income pregnant women; new mothers; infants; and children through age 4.

This report offers updated estimates of the number of people eligible for WIC benefits in 2012, including (1) estimates by participant category (including children by single year of age) and coverage rates, (2) updated estimates in U.S. territories, and (3) confidence intervals.

Methodology

The national estimates presented below are based on a methodology developed in 2003 by the Committee on National Statistics of the National Research Council (CNSTAT). The report’s State-level estimates use a methodology developed by the Urban Institute that apportions the national figures using data from the American Community Survey.

The estimates consider poverty level, adjunctive income eligibility (e.g., due to participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or Medicaid), national estimates of nutritional risk, and State-level estimates of duration of breastfeeding.

The estimates presented in this report are the third set of WIC eligibles estimates that reflect the results from the 2010 Census, which show fewer infants and young children in the U.S. population than the previous, intercensal Census estimates. Estimates before 2010 were extrapolated from the 2000 Census.¹ Therefore, the estimates in this

report are not directly comparable to estimates in this series published before 2010.

Results: WIC-Eligible Population

- FNS estimates that the average monthly WIC-eligible population totaled 14.05 million in 2012.
- Children ages 1 to 4 made up more than 60 percent of the eligible population.

| Participant Group | # Eligible (Millions) | % of All Eligibles | # Participating | Coverage Rate |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Infants | 2.42 | 17.2% | 2.06 | 85.1% |
| Total Children Ages 1-4 | 8.82 | 62.8% | 4.72 | 53.4% |
| Children Age 1 ^a | 2.19 | 15.5% | | |
| Children Age 2 ^a | 2.20 | 15.6% | | |
| Children Age 3 ^a | 2.23 | 15.9% | | |
| Children Age 4 ^a | 2.21 | 15.7% | | |
| Pregnant Women | 1.25 | 8.9% | 0.88 | 70.9% |
| Postpartum Women | 1.56 | 11.1% | 1.20 | 77.0% |
| Breastfeeding Women | 0.84 | 6.0% | 0.59 | 70.4% |
| Nonbreastfeeding Women | 0.72 | 5.1% | 0.61 | 84.6% |
| All Participant Groups | 14.05 | 100.0% | 8.86 | 63.1% |

^a WIC coverage rates for children by single year of age are not provided because participation data are not available by single year of age.

*Calendar Year

Results: WIC Coverage Rates

The percentage of the eligible population that receives WIC benefits is the program’s “coverage rate.”

- In the average month of 2012, WIC served an estimated 63.1 percent of those eligible for WIC, essentially unchanged from 2011.
- For more than a decade, WIC’s overall estimated coverage rate has fluctuated in a narrow range from 56 to 63 percent.
- Regional coverage rates have also remained relatively stable over time, with the Mountain Plains region having the lowest coverage rate

¹ See U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, *National and State-Level Estimates of Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Eligibles and Program Reach, 2000-2009*, Betson, et al, December 2011, <<http://www.fns.usda.gov/ops/wic-studies>>.

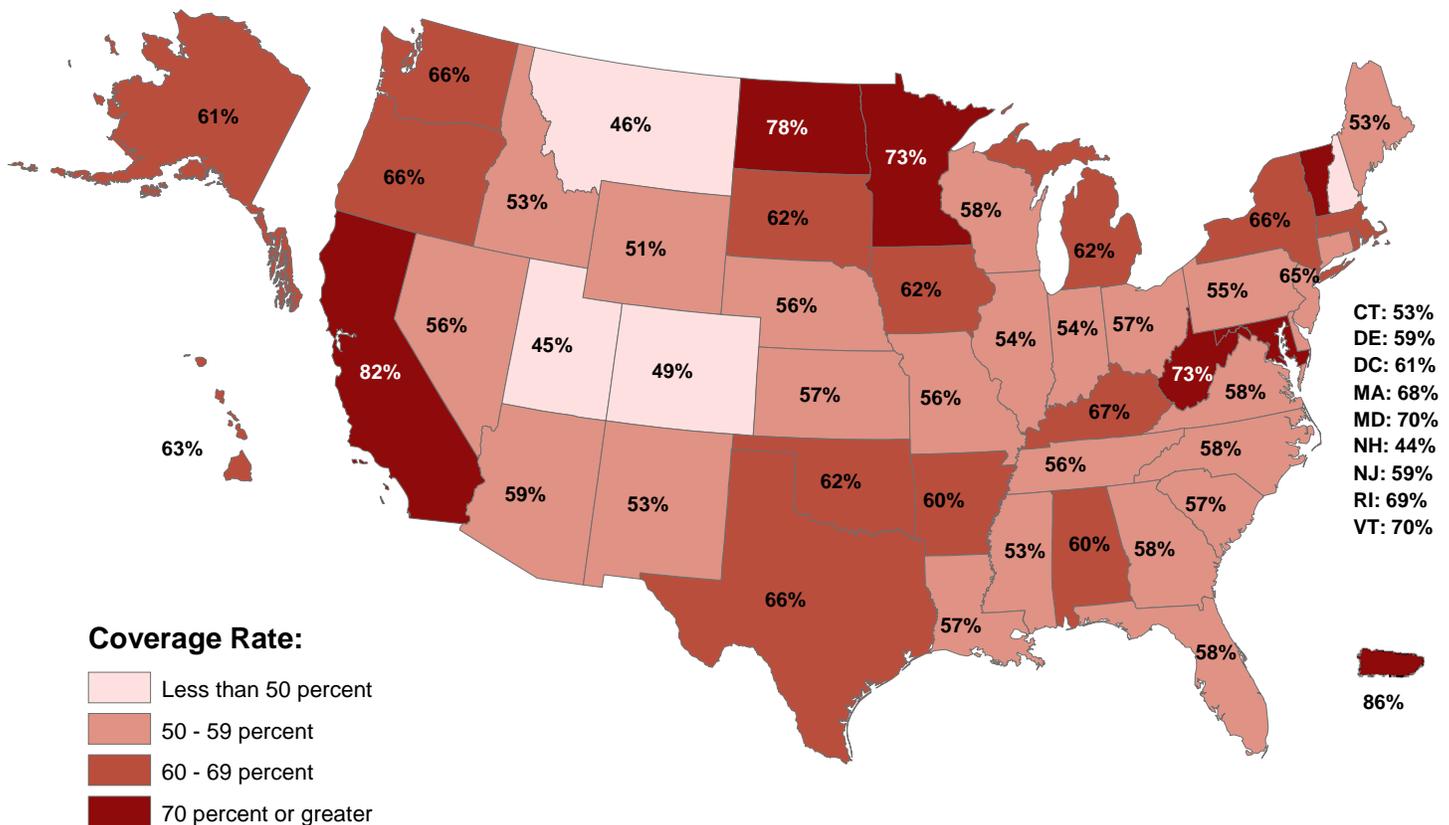
(between 50 and 54 percent) and the Western region having the highest coverage rate (between 63 and 74 percent).

- As in 2011, the estimated number of eligible breastfeeding women exceeded the estimated number of eligible nonbreastfeeding women, due to substantial increases in the estimated breastfeeding rates for both WIC and non-WIC mothers between 2010 and 2012. WIC participation levels for these subgroups remained relatively flat, however, meaning that we estimate a lower coverage rate for breastfeeding women and a higher coverage

rate for nonbreastfeeding women in 2012 than in 2010 or 2011.

- The coverage rate for WIC-eligible infants was highest among WIC participant subgroups at 85 percent in the average month of 2012, while the coverage rate for WIC-eligible children continued to lag behind all other participant groups, at about 53 percent.
- Coverage rates vary substantially by State, as demonstrated by the map below. (Note: Confidence intervals for States with small populations are larger than for other States, so differences between States and year-to-year may be less pronounced than they appear.)

**Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
Coverage Rates for All Participants by State, Calendar Year 2012**



U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. *National and State-Level Estimates of Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Eligibles and Program Reach, 2012*, by Paul Johnson, Linda Giannarelli, Erika Huber, and David Betson. Project Officer: Grant Lovellette. Alexandria, VA: January 2015.

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