



# FOR A STRONGER, HEALTHIER AMERICA

THE SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN (WIC) IS A TARGETED, TIME LIMITED SUPPLEMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITION PROGRAM THAT SERVES OVER 8 MILLION VULNERABLE WOMEN, INFANTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN ACROSS THE UNITED STATES.

## MISSION OF WIC

To assure healthy pregnancies, healthy birth outcomes and healthy growth and development for women, infants and children up to age 5 who are at nutrition risk, by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information and education on healthy eating, and referrals to health care and critical social services.

## THE CRITICAL NEED FOR WIC

Across the United States, in urban and rural areas, WIC's time-limited services and benefits ensure that children get a strong, healthy start in life. There is clear evidence that good

nutrition during pregnancy and in the first few years of life has long-term positive impacts on health. When children have a healthy start, their prospects, and America's prospects, are brighter.

With historically strong bipartisan support and clear evidence demonstrating how WIC is both efficient and effective at improving the health of low income children, WIC ensures the future health and safety of millions of Americans.

Through quality nutrition services, WIC addresses critical public health concerns threatening America. New research suggests that the obesity epidemic, for example, may pose a threat to both national security and our economy.<sup>123</sup> It is clear that WIC services that improve the healthfulness of young children's diets are more crucial than ever.

## WIC SUPPORTS THE MILITARY

DID YOU KNOW THAT WIC SUPPORTS MILITARY FAMILIES ACROSS

## AMERICA AND MANY MILITARY COMMISSARIES ARE AUTHORIZED WIC VENDORS?

In Florida, all 10 military bases have commissaries that are authorized WIC vendors. In California, in one month (August 2016), more than 4,000 WIC military families redeemed WIC food instrument at one of the 24 commissaries, representing a total of \$171,224 in monthly monetary benefits for California military families.

## FROM OUR PARTICIPANTS

**"WIC was compassionate while others cast judgment."**  
WIC Participant, Illinois

**"WIC has meant support in my journey to becoming a mom."**  
WIC Participant, Florida

**"Many years ago I received a hand-up from WIC so that I could provide for my family to get through some very tough times."**  
WIC Participant, Iowa

## WHO DOES WIC SERVE?



**8 MILLION**

mothers and young children each month through 10,000 clinics nationwide



**773,000**

pregnant women



**593,000**

breastfeeding women



**2.0 MILLION**

infants (under the age of 1)



**4.2 MILLION**

children (aged 1 until their 5th birthday)

FY2015 data: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/wic-program>



## FAST FACTS

**THE AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME OF WIC FAMILIES IS \$17,372<sup>4</sup>**

**85.6% OF WOMEN ON WIC ARE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 18 AND 34<sup>7</sup>**

**WIC SUPPORTS 53% OF ALL INFANTS BORN IN THE US<sup>5</sup>**

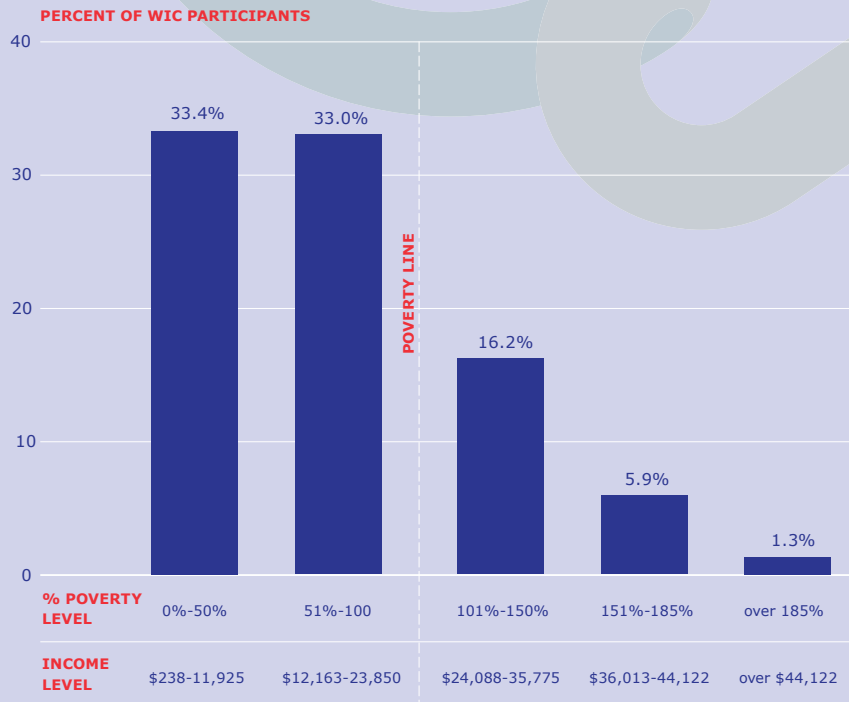
**THERE ARE 90 STATE WIC AGENCIES, 1,900 LOCAL AGENCIES AND 10,000 WIC CLINICS ACROSS AMERICA**

**APPROXIMATELY 55% OF ELIGIBLE PREGNANT WOMEN ENROLL IN WIC DURING THEIR FIRST TRIMESTER OF PREGNANCY<sup>6</sup>**

## WIC IS GOOD FOR OUR ECONOMY: CONTRIBUTING TO SUBSTANTIAL HEALTHCARE COST SAVINGS

The US spends 17% of our GDP on healthcare costs, almost twice as much as other developed countries.<sup>8</sup> Despite the high spending, life expectancy in the US is shorter and the prevalence of chronic conditions is higher. By providing preventive health services during critical periods of

## INCOME/POVERTY LEVEL OF WIC PARTICIPANTS



Source: USDA, Table 11.3, p.45 2014 WIC Program and Participants Characteristics Report

Department of Health and Human Services 2014 Poverty Guidelines for a family of four (Average WIC family size was four in 2014)

growth and development, WIC helps to lower healthcare costs and improve health outcomes for Americans.

- » WIC reduces the likelihood of adverse birth outcomes, including very low birth-weight babies.<sup>9</sup>
- » WIC improves birth outcomes for high-risk mothers.
- » Preterm births cost the US over \$26 billion a year, with average first year medical costs for a premature/low birth-weight baby of \$49,033 compared to \$4,551 for a baby born without complications.<sup>10</sup>
- » For very low birth-weight babies, a shift of one pound at birth saves approximately \$28,000 in first year medical costs.<sup>11</sup>
- » The annual cost of WIC participation per WIC participant is approximately \$775. Therefore, WIC is a wise investment.

By reducing the number of pre-term births and low birth-weight babies, WIC is contributing to substantial healthcare cost savings.

It has been estimated that \$13 billion per year would be saved if 90% of US infants were breastfed exclusively for six months.<sup>12</sup> Currently, only 22% of all American infants are exclusively breastfed at 6 months.<sup>13</sup> As a nation, we have a long way to go. WIC is playing a critical role in supporting

## WIC IS HIGHLY EFFICIENT

**NATIONWIDE, LESS THAN 8% OF WIC'S BUDGET IS SPENT ON ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS<sup>16</sup>**

moms and babies to breastfeed. This is why making the investment in WIC breastfeeding peer counselors and other breastfeeding support efforts is so critical.

## WIC BRINGS MONEY INTO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

There are over 47,000 authorized WIC retailers in the US, from small corner stores to big box stores. In fiscal year 2013, \$6.3 billion of WIC food benefits were spent in local communities across the country, but only \$4.4 billion of those dollars were provided by the government.<sup>14</sup> This happens because WIC cost containment initiatives save federal tax dollars. The most prominent cost containment measure, the WIC infant formula manufacturers' rebate program, generated \$1.9 billion dollars of non-taxpayer funds that supported the program or just over 1 in 4 WIC participants in FY2014.<sup>15</sup>

WIC also supports American farmers -- over \$15 million per year is spent at farmers' markets through the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). This program provides coupons that WIC families can use to purchase fresh and local produce at the farmers' market.

“ ALL OF THE TIPS AND INFO WIC PROVIDES ARE AWESOME. I COULDN'T IMAGINE MYSELF WITHOUT

THE HELP AND INFORMATION THAT THIS PROGRAM PROVIDES. ”

WIC PARTICIPANT,  
KANSAS

## WIC: BUILDING HEALTHY FAMILIES

WIC provides 4 core services: nutrition education, breastfeeding support, healthy foods package, and referrals to health and social services. WIC helps ensure that kids enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn.

### NUTRITION EDUCATION – LEARNING TO BE HEALTHY

WIC supports families to make healthy changes to their lifestyle through nutrition education that can take various forms, from online modules to group classes to one-on-one counseling. The nutrition education in WIC helps families connect the dots between health, growth, and development.

The nutrition counseling approach used by WIC staff is participant-centered and intentionally directs WIC families to consider their own behaviors and highlights their capacities, strengths, and needs, rather than their problems or negative behaviors. WIC nutrition educators (i.e. dietitians, nutritionists and other professionals) are trained in nutrition counseling. They are credible sources of nutrition information.

- » In new FNS research, mothers report that WIC has helped them to make positive changes in how they feed themselves and their families.<sup>17</sup>
- » Twenty plus years ago, early introduction of solid foods to a babies' diet was a significant problem (at least 62% of mothers introduced foods before 4 months of age). Today, only 20% of WIC mothers are introducing solids before 4 months.<sup>18</sup>

“ WIC ALSO OFFERS A BREASTFEEDING GROUP WHICH IS VERY IMPORTANT TO ME BECAUSE I DO NOT HAVE A LOT OF SUPPORT BREASTFEEDING AT HOME. ”

WIC PARTICIPANT, COLORADO

## FAST FACTS

RECENT RESEARCH SHOWS THAT HIGH-QUALITY ONLINE NUTRITION EDUCATION IN WIC CAN SUPPORT PARTICIPANT SATISFACTION<sup>19</sup>

ONE-ON-ONE COUNSELING IS THE PRIMARY DELIVERY METHOD FOR WIC NUTRITION EDUCATION<sup>20</sup>

WIC NUTRITION EDUCATION HAS SHOWN TO HELP INCREASE THE CONSUMPTION OF HEALTHFUL FOODS<sup>21</sup>

### BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT AND PROMOTION

Within the US, there is a disparity in breastfeeding rates between low-income women and higher-income women. The barriers to breastfeeding include social pressures, a quick return to work after delivery, lack of facilities to breastfeed or pump in the workplace and targeted marketing by the infant formula industry. WIC has been successful in supporting low-income women with the initiation of breastfeeding and is leading efforts to increase breastfeeding duration. In the last two decades, 28% of WIC moms initiated breastfeeding. Breastfeeding rates rose from 42% in 1998 to 70% in 2014.

## HOW DOES WIC SUPPORT BREASTFEEDING?

- » Breastfeeding education is integrated into prenatal education for all pregnant WIC participants.
- » WIC mothers choosing to breastfeed are provided information through counseling and breastfeeding educational materials.
- » Breastfeeding mothers:
  - receive follow-up support from trained staff, including peer counselors where available.
  - are eligible to participate in WIC longer than non-breastfeeding mothers.
  - can receive breast pumps and breastfeeding accessories to help support the initiation and continuation of breastfeeding.
- » Mothers who exclusively breastfeed their infants receive an enhanced food package.
- » WIC helps moms to breastfeed for longer. New research shows that at 12 months' post-partum 18% of WIC moms are still breastfeeding. This is a vast improvement, 20+ years ago only 7% of moms were breastfeeding at 12 months.<sup>22</sup>
- » WIC staff are trusted sources of breastfeeding information, in fact, a recent FNS study shows that WIC staff are the second most common group that women speak with about breastfeeding (after husbands/partners).<sup>23</sup>

The long- and short-term impacts of breastfeeding are well established. Research indicates that breastfeeding can help reduce the risk of some diseases and infections for both the infant and mother and, for infants, reduce the risk of developing obesity later in childhood.

WIC services improve breastfeeding rates among diverse populations of

low-income women.<sup>24</sup> Participation in the WIC breastfeeding peer counseling program is associated with an increased rate of breastfeeding initiation.<sup>25</sup> In addition, women who attend WIC breastfeeding support groups are twice as likely to plan to breastfeed as those who do not.<sup>26</sup>

## FAST FACTS

**93% OF STATE AGENCIES REPORT OPERATING OR OVERSEEING A LOCAL AGENCY THAT HAS A PEER COUNSELOR PROGRAM<sup>27</sup>**

**BREASTFEEDING INITIATION RATES IN WIC HAVE INCREASED FROM 42% IN 1998 TO 70% IN 2014<sup>28</sup>**

**BREASTFEEDING MOMS CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE PROGRAM LONGER AND RECEIVE A SPECIAL ENHANCED FOOD PACKAGE TO SUPPORT THEIR UNIQUE NUTRITIONAL NEEDS**

**MATERNAL WIC PARTICIPATION HAS BEEN SHOWN TO IMPROVE BREASTFEEDING RATES<sup>29</sup>**

## HEALTHY FOOD – FUELING HEALTHY GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The WIC food package provides a wide range of healthy food to supplement the diets of WIC mothers and young children. A pregnant woman, postpartum mom, breastfed infant, formula-fed infant, or a young child, receives different foods tailored to meet their nutritional needs.

The WIC food package is reviewed at least every 10 years. The independent

National Academy of Medicine has made sure that the food package: is science based aligned with the most up-to-date Dietary Guidelines for Americans, meets the nutritional needs of WIC families, is culturally appropriate, and includes foods that appeal to young families. This process ensures that all of the foods in the food package are only included if scientific research deems them important to support the health of low-income women, infants, and children -- only necessary foods are included in WIC.

WIC families shop for their WIC foods using either an EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) card or paper vouchers. By 2020, all states must transition to using EBT cards. As of January 2017, 24 states and Indian Nations have fully implemented EBT statewide. The transition to EBT will reduce opportunities for fraud and abuse, ensuring WIC remains efficient and effective.

WIC foods include:

- » Commercially prepared infant fruits/vegetables and meat
- » Infant cereal
- » Milk
- » Whole grain cereals
- » Whole wheat bread
- » Canned fish
- » Canned and dry beans/peanut butter
- » Cheese
- » Juice
- » Eggs
- » Iron fortified formula

In addition to the WIC food package, WIC mothers and young children receive a Cash Value Voucher (CVV) for fruits and vegetables that they can spend at the grocery store on fruits and vegetables of their choice. Some states also allow CVV to be used at farmers' markets.

The food package was last updated in 2009 after an independent scientific

review in 2006. Since that update, a growing body of literature has emerged that demonstrates the positive impact WIC foods have on the families we serve.<sup>30 31 32 33 34</sup>

“ SERIOUSLY, I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WOULD HAVE DONE WITHOUT THE FOOD VOUCHERS THAT THE WIC PROGRAM PROVIDED....TODAY MY DAUGHTER IS 13 YEARS OLD. I HAVE AN AMAZING CAREER. I PURCHASED MY OWN HOME, ALL BY MYSELF AS A SINGLE MOM. ”

**WIC PARTICIPANT,  
CALIFORNIA**

## FAST FACTS

**CHANGES TO THE WIC FOOD PACKAGE HELPED CHILDREN SCORE HIGHER ON THE HEALTHY EATING INDEX<sup>35</sup>**

**SINCE THE FOOD PACKAGE UPDATES, WIC FAMILIES' FOOD PURCHASING HABITS HAVE BECOME HEALTHIER<sup>36</sup>**

**HOUSEHOLDS ENROLLED IN WIC TEND TO PURCHASE MORE WHOLEGRAIN BREADS AND BROWN RICE<sup>37</sup>**

## BRIDGING IMPORTANT HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Referrals or connections to other services such as prenatal or pediatric care, dental care, and social services, are part of the core services provided

through WIC. Through referrals, WIC builds bridges, connecting families to primary and preventive health care and social service resources.

- » The healthcare needs of children participating in both WIC and Medicaid are better met than low-income children not participating in WIC.<sup>38</sup>
- » Children who participate in WIC are more likely to have immunization rates comparable to children with higher incomes.<sup>39</sup>

## WIC: A BRIDGE TO PEDIATRIC DENTAL CARE

Tooth decay is one of the most chronic childhood conditions.<sup>40</sup> One study found that children who participated in WIC were more likely to have a dental visit and use preventive dental services and less likely to use emergency services for dental problems.<sup>41</sup> Results from the same study also indicated that children who participated in WIC for a full year were about 1.7 times more likely to have 2 or more dental visits per year than those children who never participated in WIC.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, WIC children between ages 1 and 2 have lower dental-related Medicaid costs compared to children who do not participate in WIC.<sup>43</sup>

“ I WENT TO WIC WITH A REAL HEALTH CONCERN I HAD ABOUT MY TWO YEAR OLD DAUGHTER. THE NUTRITIONIST REFERRED US TO A SPECIALIST WHO TOOK GREAT CARE OF HER AND PLACED HER ON A SPECIAL DIET. THE DIET INCLUDES EXTRA AMOUNTS OF MY DAUGHTER'S FAVORITE FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES - THESE HAVE PROVEN TO BE VERY COSTLY. BECAUSE OF THE OTHER FOODS I GET FROM WIC AND THE NEW FRUIT AND VEGGIE BENEFIT, I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO AFFORD THE EXTRA COSTS - MY DAUGHTER IS DOING SO WELL AS A RESULT. I WANT YOU PEOPLE TO KNOW WIC DOES WORK, AND WHAT A REAL DIFFERENCE YOUR PROGRAM MAKES TO OUR LITTLE GIRL. ”

**WIC PARTICIPANT, VERMONT**





# STRENGTHENING FAMILIES, STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES, STRENGTHENING AMERICA

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