



# WHY ADVOCACY MATTERS

Advocacy is one of the greatest tools we have to protect and strengthen WIC. Speaking up and speaking out is an important part of your role as an employee of WIC. Because you are a WIC expert, you already have the knowledge base to be a strong advocate for the program (you may just need some tips and pointers, which can be found in the following sections of this toolkit!). Even though NWA's Government Affairs Team is tasked with advocating for WIC to policymakers, constituent voices are a crucial piece of our advocacy efforts. Policymakers are much more apt to listen and take an interest in WIC if residents of their state or district are speaking up, rather than just NWA lobbyists in Washington, DC. As a WIC staff member, you also have the ability to bring the stories and voices of the WIC participants you serve to policymakers.

Advocacy efforts by WIC staff from state and local WIC agencies have led to a number of significant accomplishments in the last twenty years, including during difficult political times. For instance, without WIC advocacy, we probably would not have achieved adequate funding to meet caseload needs since the mid-1990's. We probably also would not have achieved all of the improvements to the WIC food packages, which went into effect in 2009 and 2014. Advocacy has also led to positive changes like the ability to use food dollars for breast pumps and the establishment of WIC's breastfeeding peer counselor program.

As mentioned in the *What is Advocacy?* section of the toolkit,

advocacy can take place with many different stakeholders and on many different levels, including the local, state, and federal levels. Advocacy efforts at each of these levels are important for different reasons.

- » **ON THE LOCAL LEVEL**, advocating for WIC can help foster a community that supports WIC and WIC clients, helping to improve the WIC client experience, reducing stigma, and improving participation rates. In 2017, NWA commissioned a series of interviews with a range of community stakeholders about WIC. We found that many people do not know about WIC's purpose, goals, or successes. When people did not know about WIC, they formed negative opinions based on misinformation. It is important for WIC staff to educate members of your community about the value of WIC, to dispel any myths and misinformation, and to make sure that your community has a positive opinion of WIC. If a community views a program as important, this sentiment can work its way to state and national decision-makers, particularly through traditional and social media.
- » **ON THE STATE LEVEL**, telling WIC's story and helping state-level stakeholders understand and appreciate the gifts that WIC brings to public health solutions in your state is vital to WIC's success. It is important for state health officials and policymakers to know that WIC is contributing

to improved nutritional and health outcomes in your state. This can lead state policymakers to seize opportunities to improve and expand WIC at the state level and avoid state policies that would threaten WIC.

- » **ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL**, it is important for you to lift up your voice for WIC as a constituent of your Senators' state and Representative's district. Members of Congress are in Washington to represent the interests of their constituents, including you. They want to hear from you, and they want to try to keep you happy by standing up for the issues you care about. You have power because you determine if your Senators and Representative will get re-elected with your votes. If you speak up and educate about the value of WIC in their district or state, they will know WIC is important to you and many others they serve. As a result, they may be more likely to vote in favor of policies that will strengthen WIC and against policies that would weaken the program.

WIC advocacy—at all levels—is especially important in our current political environment, because WIC is at risk of budget cuts and unfavorable programmatic changes. We are counting on you to help us stand up to these threats by lifting up your WIC voice.

