NWA 2016 Research Needs to Support an Effective and Efficient WIC Program

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2016 Washington Leadership Conference
• NWA Evaluation Committee.

• Highlight areas for focused research.

• Research to further bolster the four pillars of WIC services.

• 2016: women’s health, obesity and data.

• https://www.nwica.org/research-activities
What do you think of when you hear the word research?
Think of the bigger picture
Women’s Health

• WIC’s unique opportunity to engage with women in between pregnancies.

• Address a number of physical and mental health issues, within the scope of WIC practice.
Recommendations

• Research to explore innovative approaches to addressing postpartum health issues that fall within the appropriate scope of practice for WIC.

• Building partnerships with the medical community to provide services that are beyond that scope – mental health.
Obesity continues to be a focus of the WIC program.

Childhood obesity is linked to adult obesity and obesity early in life accelerates the onset of obesity-related chronic health problems.

Once an individual becomes overweight or obese, it can be difficult to revert back to a healthy weight.
Height and weight data

• Loss of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Pregnancy and Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance Programs (PedNSS/PNSS)

• Coordination is needed at the national and regional levels to facilitate the standardization, planning, and implementation of WIC data-derived obesity reports.

• Important that State WIC programs continue to maintain standardization in measurement, analysis and reporting of childhood obesity prevalence estimates from WIC height and weight measures.
Data

• Demonstrates effectiveness and efficiency of WIC.
• Program planning, monitoring, evaluation, surveillance.
• Challenge – different ways of collecting data and varying capacities to analyze it.
• Appropriate and sustainable funding streams must be identified.
• Improving data systems can directly benefit state and local programs.
• Data is one of WIC’s biggest resources.
Recommendations for data

• Identify and standardize key variables of interest from WIC administrative and health outcome data

• Evaluate WIC State agency management information systems (MIS) and the type of data collection in which WIC agencies are engaged.

• Explore data warehouse application and reporting systems that give local agency WIC programs access to their administrative data in a user-friendly format.

• Examine linkages with other data sources to explore characteristics of eligible non-participants.

• Explore best practices for utilizing Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) data for program management, caseload management, health outcome analysis, and strategic planning, as well as for cost containment and program integrity.
What do we do with the Research Needs Assessment?

- Use it to engage with researchers, focus research on WIC.
- Monitor research and developments in these three areas and keep you updated.
- **Over 40 years of research!** Use it to demonstrate the amount of research being undertaken on WIC – foundation of research and evidence.
- Recognizes the value of collaborations between the research and WIC community.
Guidance for Planning, Conducting and Communicating a WIC Research Project

Planning a Research Project

For over 40 years WIC has been helping low-income families access healthy food, breastfeeding support, nutrition counseling and referrals to health and social services. Although WIC is one of the most researched Federal nutrition programs, there are always opportunities for meaningful research that could fill knowledge gaps and provide informative lessons for the program and new data that can support advocacy efforts. Additionally, research on WIC occurs across disciplines and topics, including, for example, nutrition, breastfeeding, food policy, public policy, and behavioral economics.

If you are looking for topics to research, we recommend consulting the National WIC Association's Research Need Assessment, which is a list of high priority research topics for consideration by interested researchers. The latest version can be found here. In addition, there are many other research topics that are of value to WIC and those may be valuable to a specific local context.

If you are considering planning a research project that focuses on a specific locale, we encourage you to consider the research needs of the locale you hope to conduct research within. Synergies between researchers and state and local WIC staff enable WIC research projects to have a meaningful impact on local WIC programs. For example, WIC state administrators and local staff worked collaboratively with researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to develop projects to evaluate the revised WIC food packages and identify barriers to WIC child retention. As a result, the research generated from the partnership has helped inform programmatic direction.

Conducting Research within the WIC Community

The type of research you conduct may be determined by a number of factors such as timeframe, funding, and so (whether you are conducting research on a local, state or national level). Another important consideration when conducting research is the need for appropriate study design and data analysis. Depending on your research question, you may need to develop methods to gather and analyze data. It is important to consider how you will ensure the integrity and reliability of your data before you begin conducting research.

Before starting your research project, check with the local WIC office to ensure that you have the necessary permissions and approvals. It is also important to consider whether your research project will impact the local WIC program or stakeholders. If you are planning to conduct research that will affect the local WIC program or stakeholders, it is important to consider how you will ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the data.

1. Clearly communicate research objectives, both verbally and in writing, when approaching state and/or local agencies with a request for their participation. If it is not possible to communicate verbally with every potential participant due to the scale of your project, consider hosting a webinar.
2. Define who the stakeholders will be in your research project. This may be straightforward or it may be more complex depending on whether the research project is being planned and conducted by the same entity or if contractors are undertaking some aspects of the research. Regardless, all stakeholders should be clear on the roles and responsibilities.
3. Agree on the type and level of input participating State and local agencies will be asked to provide throughout the project and what form of input will be requested (interviews, advisory panel, informal phone calls, reviewing reports, etc.).
4. Be aware of local policy issues that could be of concern to states, locals and WIC participants involved in your research. For example, be aware of sensitive or contentious issues and consider what impact your research could have on policy discussions at a local and national level. If unclear about whether your research could be policy-sensitive, contact NWA or your State WIC Director to discuss.
5. Communicate with WIC staff, what new insights you think your research will contribute to the WIC program or whether the research is being performed to meet federal requirements.
6. Clearly outline what is expected of participating WIC stakeholders involved in your project.
7. Be clear on when there will be opportunities for participating WIC stakeholders to ask questions before, during and after the research takes place.
8. Provide details of the point person WIC should contact if they have questions about your research.
9. Clearly describe how you intend to use feedback provided by participating state and local agencies. For example, if you are planning on conducting an online survey of state agencies, clearly describe the data you would like to obtain, including data fields, timeframe, and expected response time.
10. Mutually agree to the sensitive data will be used for the research. Are there any Internal Review Board or Personal Identifier Information considerations? Is an MOU required? If so, discuss how these will be addressed with all stakeholders.
11. Describe who will have access to data provided for the research, how it will be stored throughout the project lifecycle, and how the data will be handled after the research is completed.
12. Mutually agree to whether and how raw data files and analytic files can be used after the research is complete.
13. If making recommendations, ensure that they are realistic and note limitations relative to their implementation.
14. Discuss with stakeholders how you plan to disseminate study findings.
NWA Evaluation Committee

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- Rachel Colchamiro, MPH, RD, LDN, CLC, Nutrition Services Section
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- Elizabeth Frazao, PhD, USDA-ERS Partner
- Melissa Abelev, USDA-FNS Partner
Are you from a Local WIC Agency and interested in research and evaluation?

We are looking for a new Evaluation Committee member!

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Thank you!