For nearly fifty years, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has delivered quality nutrition services to improve health outcomes for pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children up to age 5. WIC’s effective nutrition services – pairing access to healthy foods with tailored nutrition education – shape lifelong behaviors and ensure that children are kindergarten ready.

Although children aged 1-5 are the largest participant group, there remain many more eligible children who are not connected with WIC services. One of the most significant barriers is the duplicative recertification appointment at the child’s first birthday, which requires families to resubmit paperwork at a time when WIC’s tailored nutrition counseling is most needed. NWA recommends the extension of infant certification periods to two years.

The most significant decline in WIC participation occurs at the child’s first birthday. 79.3% of eligible infants are certified to receive WIC services, but 28% of those infants drop off the program at the child’s first birthday. This participation lapse comes at a critical moment in the child’s nutrition journey – as children are transitioning from breast milk or infant formula to solid foods, WIC’s nutrition expertise is essential to ensuring long-term healthy dietary habits. NWA recommends extending infant certification periods to two years to alleviate a significant barrier to retention at this pivotal transition point for WIC children.

While WIC is a time-limited program, federal law requires participants to routinely recertify every six months or year, depending on the jurisdiction, in order to receive WIC services for the length of the program. WIC agencies
regularly identify the recertification appointment as a significant barrier to continued participation, citing concerns about duplicative paperwork and logistical challenges. Unlike WIC’s nutrition education sessions, certification appointments require the physical presence of all WIC recipients in the clinic – including infants and young children.

To recertify, participants must schedule a distinct appointment at the clinic, diverting clinic time away from tailored nutrition education. At the recertification appointment, participants must reproduce a range of documents to reestablish eligibility. The recertification appointment also includes a number of health screenings for child participants – including a blood draw.

Federal law requires infants to recertify at six months, but permits states the option to extend a certification period to one year. Empowered with this option, every state has moved forward with implementing one-year certification periods. The longer certification period permits WIC nutrition professionals to focus clinic time on tailored counseling to participant families, lowers administrative costs, and reduces burdens on participants. The one-year mark remains a period of transition in the child’s nutrition patterns. NWA recommends two-year infant certifications as a tool to remedy the largest coverage drop between WIC participant categories and maximize efficiency for both WIC staff and participants.

WIC PARTICIPATION OVERTIME: FROM INFANTS TO TODDLERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2017 Coverage Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infants</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-Year</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Year</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Year</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Year</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10 Neuberger Z (2017) Modernizing and Streamlining WIC Eligibility Determination and Enrollment Processes. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, pg. 34. https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/1-6-17fa.pdf (since 2017, Ohio has reported that it is implementing one-year certifications).

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