When Disaster Strikes: North Carolina’s Response to Hurricane Florence

Cara Perdue PhD, RD, LDN
Regional Nutrition Consultant
Division of Public Health, Nutrition Services Branch
North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
We contract with 85 independent local agencies
Guidance is given from the state level from Regional Nutrition Consultants

Common Language
- NSB: Nutrition Services Branch
- Crossroads: Our WIC application
- Customer Service Desk: provides assistance with Crossroads issues
- SOAR: Solutran’s system, our EBT vendor
- eWIC: Oct 2017-May 2018
Correspondence prior to the storm

September 10, 2018

• WIC Policies and Procedures During a Disaster Correspondence
  • Verification of Certification (VOC)
  • Certification Extensions
  • Supporting Breastfeeding
  • Replacement of Destroyed WIC Foods
  • Remote Issuance
  • Evacuees and Emergent Needs

• Food Package Accommodations
• Infant Feeding Supplies During Emergencies
Hurricane Florence

Made landfall September 14, 2018 on the NC Coast

- Extensive wind damage
- Widespread power outages
- Record breaking storm surge
- Devastating rainfall
- Catastrophic flooding

https://www.weather.gov/mhx/Florence2018
Interstate 40 flooded as a result of Florence, blocking one of the major routes in and out of Southeastern NC. Wilmington was left mostly inaccessible by land.

https://www.weather.gov/mhx/Florence2018


Extensive flooding and damage in New Bern, NC.
Abandoned cars in Wilmington, NC

Flooded field and house in Hyde County, NC

New Bern, NC

Abandoned cars in Wilmington, NC
Background: Impact of Florence on WIC Local Agencies

- 62% of NC local WIC agencies reported some level of closure
- 190 vendors reported storm-related closures.
Objective: Mitigating Participation Loss

• Certification extensions
  • Conducted at the State Level
• Automatically issuing food benefits
  • Through the use of eWIC
Request for WIC Flexibility

September 18, 2018 received FNS approval to:

• Remote benefit issuance
• Waiver of the second nutrition education contact
• Replacement of food benefits already redeemed
• Waiver of minimum inventory requirements
• Suspension of vendor monitoring
• Extension for vendor monitoring
Methods

• Had frequent calls at the State Level to determine status of local agencies almost daily from Sept 10-Sept 28
• Local agencies were contacted
• Decision to automatically issue was determined
• Participants with current benefits available received one month of food benefits
Script Development

• Automatic issuance of benefits
• Initial run yielded large batch
• Daily running of script
Script Development

• Released benefits to participants affected by clinic closures
  • Check for certification
  • Check for issuance availability
  • Will generate **current** issuance based on most recent prescription
  • Error report will be generated (for prescription problems etc.)

• Multi-purpose
• Validation in staging environment
• Updated list of affected clinics
Script Criteria

• Select Clinics
• Participant has green dot – Automate issuance
• Current Issuance month
• Script
  • Confirm everyone that is certified
  • Check for issuance
  • If no issuance, issue per last Issuance
  • Write prescription
  • Script can be run anytime
  • If error occurs, generate an error report for State to view
Testing/Script Validation

- Ran the script in Staging and provided an “after” spreadsheet with results
- Compared “before” and “after” data
- Results as expected
- No errors generated
Methods

- Issuance occurred after business hours from September 17-September 30
  - Cut off of Sept 30th was due to formula change
- Actively certified participants received one month of benefits
- 25% of NC local agencies requested automatic issuance
Automatic Issuance and Participation

• September 2018 was the highest participation (222,901) compared to the six months prior (219,155)

• Automatic issuance had a protective effect on participation and mitigated participation loss during a disaster
NC WIC Monthly Participation Trends

Hurricane Florence & Automatic Issuance
Issuance follow-up

• After each issuance, a report was sent to each affected local agency
• Staff were encouraged to contact participants who received issuance
• Participants were notified of issuance if they had alerts set up on their BNFT app
Replacing Benefits for WIC Participants

September 20, 2018

• Only for the current month
• Affidavit attesting to WIC food benefit loss in Hurricane Florence
• NC WIC Program does not allow the following:
  • Issuing benefits early or changing family issuance dates
  • Replacement of expired participant food benefits
  • The purchase of hot or prepared foods
Replacing Benefits for WIC Participants

- 47 families were re-issued 181 benefits
- 102 of those benefits were redeemed at a total cost of $1,486.72
North Carolina WIC Program Notice

AFFIDAVIT ATTESTING TO WIC FOOD BENEFIT LOSS IN HURRICANE FLORENCE

Family ID ____________________________

Family Issue Date ____________________________

The North Carolina WIC Program may replace current food benefits for the month of September 2018 that were redeemed but damaged, destroyed or stolen due to Hurricane Florence. WIC benefits are current if the Last Date to Spend (LDTS) is equal to the current day or is in the future. If the LDTS is in the past, the benefits are expired and cannot be replaced.

I understand that by signing and dating this form I am certifying that redeemed food benefits were lost due to Hurricane Florence.

(Participant/Parent/Guardian/Caretaker Signature)  (Date)

(Staff Signature)  (Date)

Lost Benefits:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUNDAY</th>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
<th>SATURDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NSB Correspondence &amp; Check-in calls start</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hurricane Florence makes landfall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>County closures &amp; automatic issuance</td>
<td>FNS approval for WIC flexibility</td>
<td></td>
<td>Benefit replacement starts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Last day of automatic issuance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions & Lessons Learned

• Communication
  • Before
  • During
  • After
• Mitigating participation loss
  • Certification Extensions
  • Script development
  • Automatic Issuance
• Flexibility
• Challenging
Updates to the WIC Program Manual

- Disaster policies for local agencies
  - Eligibility requirements
  - Food benefits
  - Coordination
  - Supporting Breastfeeding
Hurricane Dorian

- Memo to local agencies for WIC Policies and Procedures
- Automatic issuance started September 4, 2019
- Replacement of destroyed WIC foods
  - Affidavit attesting to WIC food benefit loss
References

- https://www.weather.gov/mhx/Florence2018
- http://diymaps.net/userimages/135568.gif
Nondiscrimination Statement

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, (AD-3027) found online at: How to File a Complaint, and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;

(2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or

(3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.
Questions?