



# SUPPORT THE WISE INVESTMENT IN OUR CHILDREN (WIC) ACT

The Wise Investment in our Children (WIC) Act is common-sense legislation that would improve maternal and child health outcomes in the United States by expanding WIC eligibility for at-risk infants, children, and new mothers. For nearly 46 years, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has contributed to healthier pregnancies and improved birth outcomes for low-income women and infants and led to healthier growth and development for at-risk, low-income children up to age five. WIC has the potential to make an even greater impact should the WIC Act be adopted by making WIC more widely accessible to mothers and young children during key developmental periods.

## HEALTHY CHILDREN

Extending WIC eligibility for children by one year—until their sixth birthday—would ensure that no children are slipping through the nutrition gap between WIC and the National School Lunch Program. The National Center for Education Statistics indicates that roughly half of children start kindergarten after the age of 5<sup>1/2</sup>. This means many of these children could be facing six months or more without targeted nutrition support. The WIC Act would make sure that all children who are income-qualified can make a seamless transition between WIC and school lunch, thereby leading to healthier diets and improved physical and cognitive health outcomes.

## HOW THE WIC ACT WOULD STRENGTHEN WIC:

1. Extending eligibility for children up to age six
2. Permitting states to certify infants for two years instead of one
3. Permitting states to extend eligibility for breastfeeding and postpartum mothers for two years

## HEALTHY BABIES

Giving states the option to certify infants for two years instead of one year would allow WIC agencies to eliminate duplicative paperwork and encourage families to keep their young children on WIC longer. Many WIC families drop out of the program when an infant turns one. One reason for this is the long and burdensome certification appointment required at an infant's first birthday. If infants could be certified for two years rather than one, more children would remain in the program past their first birthday and would be able to continue to benefit from WIC's critical nutrition and public health services.

## HEALTHY MOMS

Giving states the option to extend eligibility for breastfeeding and postpartum mothers to two years would help WIC to better meet the unique needs of postpartum women. Currently, WIC provides services to postpartum women up to six months after the birth of their baby and breastfeeding women for up to one year. While the provision of these services during the postpartum period has helped to improve diets, increase breastfeeding rates, and increase

access to healthcare and social services, there is potential for WIC to have an even greater impact through expanded eligibility under the WIC Act. Medical professionals recognize that good maternal health prior to pregnancy is of vital importance to improving health outcomes for both mother and infant. Inter-natal care, the period between the birth of a woman's child and until the birth of her next child, is now seen as a critical opportunity to improve the health of mothers and outcomes for subsequent births. WIC has a crucial role to play in ensuring that mothers are receiving the nutritious foods, nutrition counseling, breastfeeding support, health screenings, and resource referrals that they need during the inter-natal period.

**BY EXPANDING WIC ELIGIBILITY FOR AT-RISK INFANTS, CHILDREN, AND NEW MOTHERS, THE WIC ACT WILL LEAD TO IMPROVED MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH OUTCOMES AND HELP TO ADDRESS NUTRITION GAPS DURING CRITICAL PERIODS OF THE LIFESPAN. IT TRULY IS A WISE INVESTMENT.**

