WIC VENDOR PARTNER ROUNDTABLE – AGENDA

Re-Focusing on COVID-19

Wednesday, March 18, 2020, 12:30 – 2:00 pm ET

These notes have not been officially finalized by the presenters and are therefore marked “DRAFT”.

Please refer to the recording of the meeting for complete information: Listen to/view meeting recording here: https://login.icohere.com/NWA-Online?pnum=HTX68150

12:30 PM - 12:45 PM ET Welcome Remarks

Elisabet Eppes, Program Innovation Director, National WIC Association (NWA)

Thank you for everyone’s flexibility.

This is a relevant topic to be discussing amidst the outbreak.

March 13th Grocery/Retailer Focused Call with NWA, Retailers, and Retailer Stakeholders:

- Many of the big chains as of last Friday are not facing shortages but are facing stocking challenges. Many retailers have the products but are finding it difficult to keep the shelves stocked. Some retailers are asking shoppers to respect quantity limits.
- FMI, and retailers generally, are asking states not to enforce minimum stocking requirements and to allow for more flexible monitoring.
- Smaller chains are experiencing some shortages (milk, canned fruits and veggies/other nonperishables).

March 17th Technology Focused Call with NWA, FIS, CDP, Three Sigma and others highlights:

- Many tech providers are modifying certification end dates and issuance
- We received requests re: broadband category for infant formula and allowing for substitutions on infant formula, which is the food we are most focused on as it relates to shortages.
- Extra benefits within the current month or an extra month? Desire to see what will happen in context of outbreak.
- CVB is limited to fruits and veggies currently. But regulatory flexibilities on food package could allow for other foods to be purchased
- Tech providers also pushing for flexibility on replacements and food substitutions

It’s apparent that we need to continue to check in as the situation unfolds. Working groups in benefit provision space, etc. Will follow-up on how people can join/lead those groups.

12:45 PM – 12:55 PM ET EBT and Vendor Management Update
House of Representatives passed a bill on Saturday that includes 500 million dollars of additional WIC funding and grants USDA the authority to waive certain regulatory and legislative requirements through September 30th – We are hopeful this gets passed soon.

There is a lot of flexibility that WIC state agencies can take advantage

- We understand shelves may be a bit low right now. All WIC state agencies have the ability to update their minimum stocking requirements (MSR). Or implement disaster MSR at any time. As long as the MSR consist of the federally mandated items.
- WIC state agencies may always modify vendor monitoring schedule, as long as you monitor 5% of your vendor’s fiscal year. You may also chose not to monitor for certain things like MSR. Federal regulation does not dictate what goes in to routine monitoring. Which gives states more flexibility.
- Vendor training – At least once every three years. Webinar with live Q&A could count as an interactive training.
- Some prices are spiking due to current high level of demand. WIC state agencies do have the responsibility to develop and implement maximum allowable reimbursement levels.
- FNS does not have the authority for food substitutions.
- We encourage state agencies and vendors to work closely together during this time.
- Can find all these resources at https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19

EBT update

- 2020 Legislative Mandate just around corner. Many states currently in high gear, expect most states to meet the mandate.
- 56 WIC state agencies have implemented EBT state wide. Over 60% of all participants and vendors are now using EBT.
- 19 State WIC Agencies now have FNS approved implantation plans, with projected rollout date of September 2020 or earlier

12:55 PM - 1:10 PM ET NWA & WIC Responses to the COVID Outbreak –

Brian Dittmeier, Senior Public Policy Counsel, NWA

- Time for partnership. We value forums like this for frank conversations on how we can best support WIC agencies
- Legislatively:
  - We’ve been hearing many concerns from retailers, agency and tech partners
  - We are counseling state agencies to follow a two-track mindset
    - What can we do with current statutory regime? What flexibilities currently exist and how can we maximize them? And how can we move to more remote settings?
  - 3 packages
    - Signed by President on March 6: $8.3 billion package
      - Target around testing and help for state and local health departments. More focused on the immediate health response.
    - March 14: Currently under consideration
Passed House early Saturday morning 363-40. Votes will begin today at 2pm. If Senate votes in favor without amendments, it will move forward to President. Hope is that he will sign it today. If signed, State agencies can move forward with second track of the strategy

- Week of March 16: Supports for economy, families, workers. Longer term supports for families. Payments being discussed for American families. May total up to $1 trillion.
- Second vehicle $500 million
- Exceptions for physical presence – under current statute, unable to transition breastfeeding women to different category. Flexibility here is important to ensure we retain participants.
- Waiver authority is more broad – will hopefully resolve barriers and allow USDA to take actions to meet the moment.

**WIC Agency responses**

- Doing their best to extend cert periods by 30 days and issue benefits remotely.
- Significant barrier in offline EBT states (6 states). Difficult to do remote issuance in this setup.
- Some have adopted drive-thru clinics with appropriate sanitary procedures to load EBT cards.
- Suspending vendor monitoring
- With additional flexibilities
  - Remote certifications
  - Extended benefit issuance – most states in position to issue 3 months of benefits at one time. Figuring out ways to rollover unredeemed items for states with paper checks.
  - Alternative food delivery systems. Working with retailers to enable curbside pickup, online ordering, delivery)
  - Ongoing concern – tech infrastructure for remote WIC agency operations

**NWA actions:**

- Collaborative calls are essential – Regular calls with state directors twice a week; with local directors once per week to continue hearing from broader membership, ITOs too
- Other calls with retail, tech, vendor partners.
- Lifting up promising practices. Working with state WIC associations to arrange for retailers to hold WIC foods behind counter to ensure WIC families can redeem benefits in store. Encourage retailers to share what they are hearing re: what’s happening on ground
- NWA sending letter to USDA
- NWA sending regular updates to members lifting up promising practices

Natalie Moran, Media Communications Manager, NWA

Compiling toolkit that will be distributed to NWA members. This will be regularly updated as the situation continues to unfold.

**1:10 PM – 1:30 PM ET eGovernment Payments Council (eGPC) and State Agency Updates on COVID-19**

Amy Duncan, Vice President, Portfolio Management and Delivery, CDP, Inc. and Chair, eGPC
• Spring meeting focusing on the EBT environment has changed. Will be working with a variety of members to gauge challenges, obstacles and their perspectives on COVID-19.
• Hearing a lot of concern about the 2020 EBT mandate for WIC.
• Looking for guidance from FNS on how best to support the WIC community.
• Carrie and Todd are both active members of the council.

**Todd Mountin, Innovation Manager, Washington State WIC**

• Getting calls from clients that grocery store shelves are empty.
• Safeway is allocating time for elderly and high risk populations (like pregnant moms) to go into their stores and grocery shop.
• Washington State has been at this for a while and it seems to be ramping up significantly.
• Earlier this week, Todd and other employees were instructed by their department to go home and telework. Telework is standard is Washington and they are well-equipped to work from home.
• The state of Maine has closed all local agencies, but Washington State is not there yet. They are trying to manage the individual clinics on a case-by-case basis. Some are closed and some are open.
• Exploring a waiver for the medical documentation form for high risk clients to ensure they have whatever additional medically required foods they need. Also, exploring alternative ways to get those foods to families.
• Tracking redemptions and saw a significant spike (almost double) earlier this week as compared to earlier this month.

**Carrie Coenen, WIC Vendor and Integrity Unit Supervisor, Wisconsin Department of Health Services**

• Echoed Todd on increase in WIC volume. They have an increase of about 30% in their daily draws.
• Heard there are some participants coming back to the program who haven’t participated in a while. Possibly due to business closures and economic hardships since bars, restaurants, and other businesses have closed down.
• Have discontinued all discretionary travel.
• Continuing to process any vendor applications.
• Some staff are working remotely and some are in the office. They currently do not have the technology for everyone to work from home. Have alerted public and vendors that they are still working.
• Putting out messages on the WIC shopper app to ask clients to stay home if sick and alerting them of the latest retail updates.
• In conversation with WI Grocer Association, wholesale distributors, and others. Supply is there and telling their participants to be patient.

**1:30 PM – 2:00 PM ET  Group Discussion and Wrap-up**

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