

NATIONAL WIC ASSOCIATION'S 2026 POLICY AGENDA

For more than 50 years, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has improved breastfeeding, nutrition, and health outcomes for participants during pregnancy, postpartum, infancy, and early childhood.

This year, policymakers have the opportunity to renew the nation's investment in WIC, prevent significant service disruptions, and ensure the program can continue providing healthy foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and healthcare referrals to give our nation's children a healthy start to life.

As the recent government shutdown underscored, young families must be able to count on WIC to provide the support they need, even in times of uncertainty. The National WIC Association (NWA) is the nonprofit voice of the 12,000 public health nutrition service provider agencies who serve nearly 6.9 million mothers, babies, and young children participating in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). NWA provides education, guidance, and support to WIC staff; and drives innovation and advocacy to strengthen WIC as we work toward a nation of healthier families.

APPROPRIATIONS

For nearly 30 years, Congress has provided WIC with the resources to serve every eligible individual who seeks WIC certification, "fully funding" WIC through the appropriations process on a bipartisan basis. **It is critical that lawmakers uphold this commitment in the coming fiscal years in order to protect participant trust and safeguard WIC's longstanding public health success.**

CONGRESS SHOULD:

"Fully fund" WIC to provide healthy food and breastfeeding resources for projected caseloads, ensuring that every eligible person can receive the program's full, evidence-based food package, including the full fruit and vegetable benefit. Congress should also take steps to protect the implementation of appropriated funds.

Invest in set-asides to support necessary updates to WIC infrastructure and Management Information Systems (MIS), and program evaluation and monitoring costs.

Protect the integrity of WIC's evidence-based food packages, rejecting any riders that would halt or interfere with implementation of the April 2024 rule updating WIC's food packages to reflect advancements in nutrition science and offer participants more choices.

Ensure WIC is protected during future government shutdowns and emergencies by supporting the WIC contingency fund that was crucial to supporting temporary program operations during the fall 2025 government shutdown. Congress should provide sufficient resources to support WIC operations for approximately one month and increase WIC's spend-forward authority to 10 percent to improve State Agencies' ability to make multi-year financial plans.

Increase investment in the WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor program to facilitate nationwide access to community breastfeeding support for all WIC participants.

Strengthen support and explore flexibilities for the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) to protect families' access to local, fresh foods from approved local farmers and other small vendors. Recent reductions in federal appropriations have made it difficult for states to maintain their FMNP programs and sustain recent modernization efforts, resulting in decreased support for farmers and growers, as well as WIC families.

SUPPORT CONTINUED EFFORTS TO BUILD A MODERN WIC PROGRAM:



Modernization waivers from USDA have allowed WIC agencies to take huge strides in advancing service delivery and better meeting the needs of busy families. Most significantly, many State and Local Agencies have used these waivers to create virtual service options, allowing participants to be certified by phone or video appointment, akin to modern telehealth options, while protecting quality of service and program integrity. Research by the National WIC Association and the Nutrition Policy Institute found that 80% of participants surveyed indicated that remote services reduced preexisting barriers like transportation. However, absent Congressional action, these flexibilities will expire this year on September 30, 2026, undoing years of progress in modernizing service delivery. **We are asking Congress to modernize WIC's physical presence requirement and create permanent hybrid services to provide participants with flexibility and choice.**

NWA URGES CONGRESS TO:

- Allow certification by phone or video appointment, at participant election, while maintaining in-person service options and protecting WIC as a highly effective public health program with strong program integrity measures.
- Invest in updates to WIC's MIS to streamline certification and modernize service delivery.
- Support ongoing efforts at FNS to provide nationwide access to modern service delivery models, including finalizing rulemaking on online shopping.

PROTECT WIC ACCESS AND ELIGIBILITY

Recent efforts to limit eligibility for basic needs programs have underscored the need to ensure WIC can continue to serve all eligible families, including immigrant and mixed-status families.

NWA CALLS ON LAWMAKERS TO:

- **Reject attempts, whether legislative or administrative, to restrict access to WIC.**
- Ensure that WIC participant data is protected and never shared for non-program purposes.
- Safeguard community trust by affirming WIC's role as a public health program that protects children's nutrition and health.

PREVENT DISMANTLING OF CRITICAL ADMINISTRATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE:

WIC State Agencies rely on close collaboration with expert program staff for USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) for timely guidance, technical assistance, research, and disbursement of resources. Since January 2025, more than 500 of 1800 FNS staff have left their roles, leading to challenges and delays in WIC operations due to significant loss of expertise and institutional knowledge at both regional and national offices. Recently announced plans to reorganize USDA, including proposals to relocate all FNS offices, risk further staff attrition and loss of expertise and may leave FNS without the ability to conduct core functions, such as the disbursement of WIC funds.

NWA CALLS ON CONGRESS TO:

- Urge USDA to pause reorganization plans until stakeholder feedback is fully considered.
- Ensure departmental changes do not jeopardize the infrastructure and expertise that WIC staff depend on.

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