



# Advancing Health Equity to Achieve Diversity and Inclusion: AHEAD in WIC

## Results from the National Landscape Scan – Outreach and Partnerships

### NWA's MISSION

The National WIC Association (NWA) provides its members with tools and leadership to expand and sustain effective nutrition services for mothers and young children.

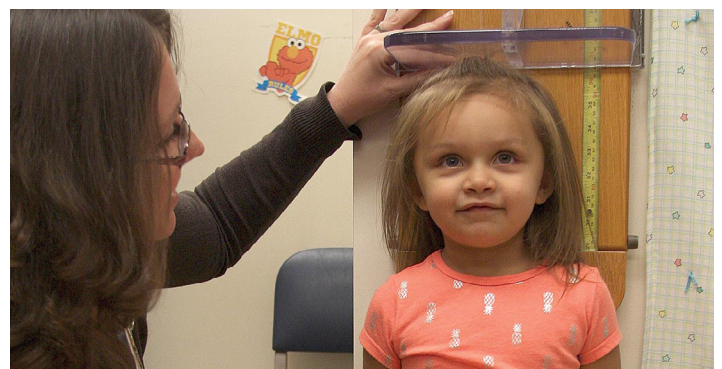
In 2019, the National WIC Association (NWA) received a grant from the Walmart Foundation to support a two-year project aimed at Advancing Health Equity to Achieve Diversity & Inclusion (AHEAD) in WIC. One of the key goals of AHEAD in WIC was to systematically build capacity among WIC agencies and staff to incorporate a health equity framework into WIC research, policy, and practice. As part of the AHEAD project, NWA worked with Nutrition Equity and Justice Partners, a nutrition and health equity consulting company, to conduct a national landscape scan targeting WIC stakeholders to identify emerging and promising practices being implemented at the state and local level to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Specifically, the purpose of the landscape scan was to:

- 1) Learn more about the existing policies, procedures, and practices being used to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in WIC and
- 2) Help NWA understand gaps, systems/training needs, and areas for expanding collaborations to achieve a more equitable WIC environment for staff, clients, and other stakeholders.

### BACKGROUND

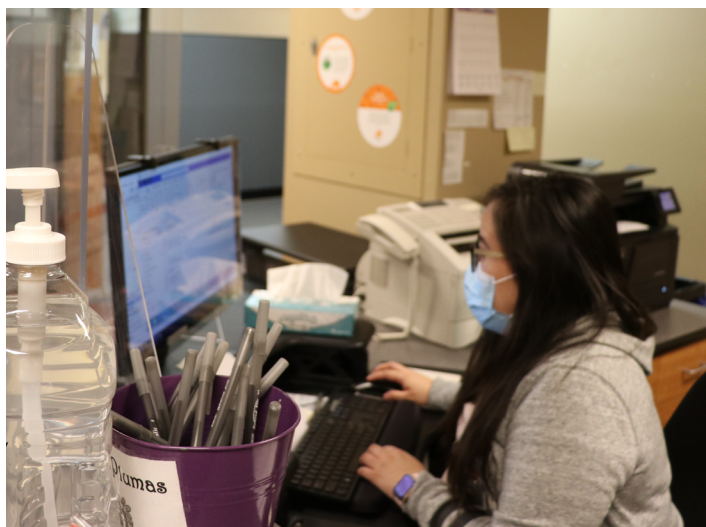
In the last decade, there has been increased awareness about the need to build a diverse and inclusive culture in community nutrition programs to ensure equitable access nutrition services. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has made a commitment to promoting equity and inclusion through federal nutrition assistance programs to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse client population. This one-pager presents results from the landscape scan related to barriers and facilitators to support equity, diversity, and inclusion in outreach and partnerships.

**For NWA, health equity is the ability of all individuals to achieve optimal health, irrespective of their identity, race, ability, or class. This requires equitable access to nutritious foods, breastfeeding support, chronic disease prevention and management services, safe living environments, and good jobs with fair pay. It necessitates removing obstacles to families' short- and long-term health and well-being including poverty, discrimination, institutional racism and other forms of bias expressed through housing, healthcare, education, labor, and other public policies.**



## METHODOLOGY

The national landscape survey was conducted from November 2020–February 2021 via Survey-Monkey. Questions on the survey were informed by previous EDI surveys and frameworks and the existing EDI literature. Respondents were asked about their knowledge, capacity, prioritization, and clinic approaches for promoting EDI and to provide personal demographic information and general information about their WIC agency. In addition, state and local WIC Directors were asked to provide information about agency-level policies and procedures being implemented to support EDI efforts (e.g., updated mission and vision, hiring, training, contracting, etc.). Survey questions covering each EDI topic area were separated into sections (e.g., EDI in client services, training and education, hiring, etc.). Participants were informed that they were not required to answer questions that made them feel uncomfortable. All State WIC Directors were sent an introductory email about the AHEAD in WIC project and were asked to complete the survey, as well as share with state and local WIC staff. Additionally, surveys were widely distributed through NWA newsletters, workgroups, and listservs.



A total of 1510 WIC directors/staff started the survey. Consistent with recommendations to maximize data quality in online surveys, respondents who completed at least 50% of the questions in each specific section were retained in the analysis.<sup>1</sup> This yielded a final nonprobability sample size of 1028 respondents for the section on training and education.

**Table 1: Demographic of Respondents (n=1028)**

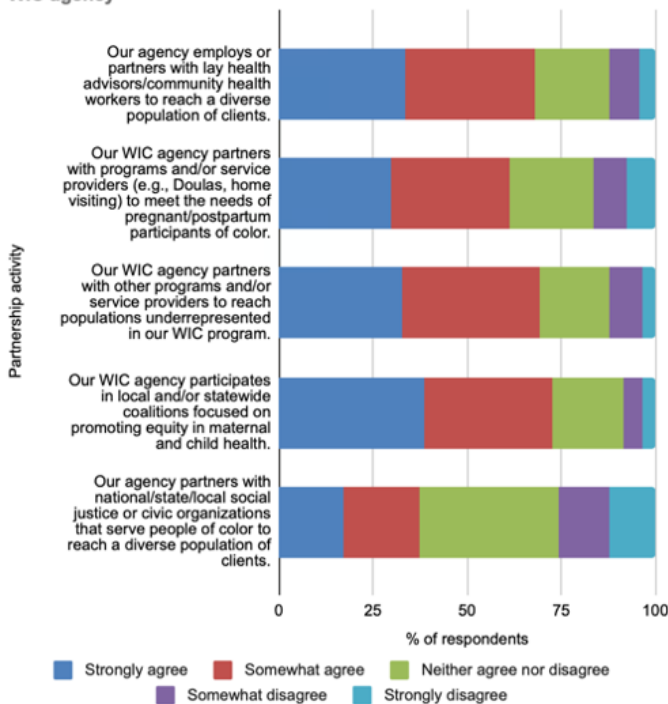
<b>Age in years</b>	
18-24	1.6%
25-34	20.6%
35-44	21.3%
45-54	23.9%
55-64	26.1%
65+	5.4%
<b>Time working at WIC</b>	
Less than 1 year	5.5%
1-3 years	15.0%
4-6 years	13.6%
6-8 years	7.0%
8-10 years	5.0%
Over 10 years	53.4%
<b>Educational attainment</b>	
≤ High school degree	6.7%
Some college, no degree	12.9%
Associate degree	8.0%
Bachelor's degree	44.4%
Master's degree	25.7%
Professional degree	1.7%
<b>Race</b>	
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	19.5%
White/Caucasian	60.6%
Black/African American	7.5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.4%
Asian	5.1%
Other race/More than one race	1.8%
<b>Gender</b>	
Cisgender Female	90.4%
Cisgender Male	4.7%
Transgender	0.1%
Other gender identity	0.9%
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	
Heterosexual or straight	90.5%
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Asexual	3.5%
<b>Disability status</b>	
Yes	3.9%
No	93.1%

## RESULTS

### Partnership Activities to Better Serve Diverse Populations and Promote EDI

Evidence has shown that community partnerships are critical for reaching and engaging a diverse population of clients and stakeholders.<sup>2,3</sup> Respondents were asked for their level of agreement on whether their agency engages in a variety of partnership activities to reach and serve diverse client populations. The greatest percentage of respondents “strongly agreed” or “somewhat agreed” that they participated in local and/or statewide coalitions focused on promoting equity in maternal and child health (72.0%), followed by partnering with other programs and/or service providers to reach populations underrepresented in their WIC program (68.5%) (Figure 1). Less than half of respondents “strongly agreed” or “somewhat agreed” to partnering with national/state/local social justice or civic organizations that serve people of color to reach a diverse population of clients.

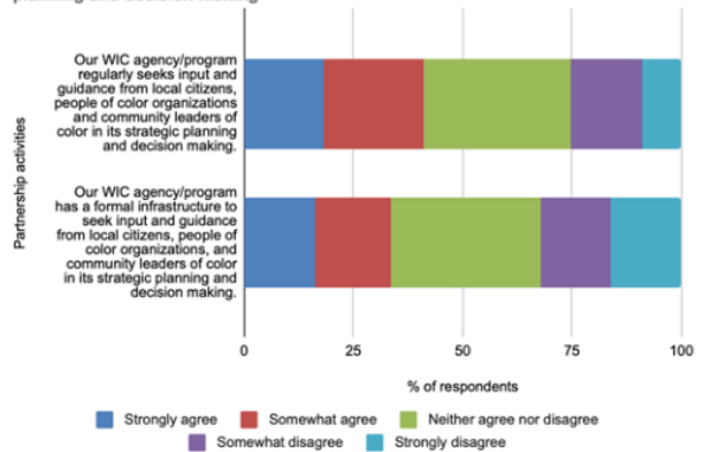
Figure 1: Level of agreement with whether certain partnership activities to increase diverse client participation take place at the respondent's WIC agency



### Partnership Activities for Strategic Planning and Decision Making

Respondents were asked if and how they leverage partnerships in strategic planning and decision making to promote EDI within their WIC program. About 40.5% of survey respondents “strongly agreed” or “somewhat agreed” that they seek input and guidance from local citizens, organizations, and community leaders of color to support decision making (Figure 2). About one-third of respondents also “strongly agreed” or “somewhat agreed” that their agency has a formal infrastructure (such as an advisory board) to seek input and guidance from local citizens, organizations, and community leaders of color to support decision making.

Figure 2: Level of agreement with statements about partnership for strategic planning and decision making



### Outreach Strategies

Respondents were asked to share more information about their agency's outreach strategies in an open-ended format. The most common types of organizations mentioned as collaborators for outreach were health care providers, other food and nutrition assistance programs (e.g. SNAP), Head Start programs, farmers market programs, community-based organizations, and schools and universities. Respondents also reported attending community events and health fairs to promote WIC. Some respondents reported that they had a specific staff person who led outreach activities for their agency. Many respondents described using printed promotional materials and/or culturally specific media channels to share information about WIC and their agency in a variety of languages. While many of the respondents shared

outreach strategies used by their WIC program, some indicated that their agency's outreach efforts were limited or that they were unaware of what was being done at their agency.

### *Information and Data to Promote Equity in Service Delivery and Reach Diverse Participants*

Respondents were asked to share how their agency uses information and data to promote equity in service delivery and to reach a diverse population of participants. The most common responses described collecting data from WIC clients using surveys and broadly using data to inform service delivery. Community health assessments were also commonly used, but it varied whether they conducted the assessments themselves or obtained the data from another entity. Some respondents said their organization is unable to collect or analyze data because they are short staffed due to COVID-19 and/or a lack of prioritization of data collection and use within the organization. Finally, many were unaware of data collection or usage in their organization and indicated that their organization does not collect or use data to inform service delivery.

## Open-Ended Responses Related to Outreach and Partnerships

**“We have partnered with local postpartum doula group who provides free home visits and breast-feeding support services in both English and Spanish”.**

**- Nutritionist at a WIC Local Agency**

**“WIC works with multiple agency partners who serve diverse populations in the local communities to keep them updated on services, provide WIC materials for their clients, and encourage them to refer clients to us”.**

**- Administrative Staff at a WIC Local Agency**

## CONCLUSION

Many WIC agencies partner with a variety of organizations to recruit and serve diverse participant populations. The most common partnerships include maternal and child health coalitions, community-based organizations, health care providers, and government programs. Strengthening these partnerships can inform strategic planning and decision making for WIC service delivery. There is also an opportunity to share promising practices related to outreach, partnership, and using data to inform WIC services.



## REFERENCES

- 1 Kees, J., Berry, C., Burton, S., & Sheehan, K. (2017). An analysis of data quality: Professional panels, student subject pools, and Amazon's Mechanical Turk. *Journal of Advertising*, 46(1), 141-155.
- 2 Aguilar-Gaxiola, S., Ahmed, S. M., Anise, A., Azzahir, A., Baker, K. E., Cupito, A., ... & Zaldivar, R. (2022). Assessing Meaningful Community Engagement: A Conceptual Model to Advance Health Equity through Transformed Systems for Health: Organizing Committee for Assessing Meaningful Community Engagement in Health & Health Care Programs & Policies. *NAM perspectives*, 2022.
- 3 Klaiman, T., Chainani, A., & Bekemeier, B. (2016). The importance of partnerships in local health department practice among communities with exceptional maternal and child health outcomes. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*, 22(6), 542-549.