



# Massachusetts WIC Nutrition Program

*Special Supplemental Nutrition Program  
for Women, Infants, and Children*



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# MA WIC 2011 - 2014 SPECIAL PROJECTS GRANT MA WIC ENHANCED REFERRAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PROJECT



# MASSACHUSETTS WIC ENHANCED REFERRAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PROJECT

- ❖ **Touching Hearts-Touching Minds and Getting to the Heart of the Matter tools solicited conversations about unaddressed social issues**
- ❖ **Request for Operational Adjustment funding for pilot program in 2010**
- ❖ **Ten pilot programs across Massachusetts selected to participate**

# MASSACHUSETTS WIC ENHANCED REFERRAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PROJECT

- ❖ **USDA Special Projects Concept Paper Grant for formative research in 2010**
- ❖ **USDA Special Projects Full Grant in 2011**



# MASSACHUSETTS WIC AND REFERRALS

- ❖ Referrals are a primary component of the WIC program
- ❖ Participants experience food insecurity, housing issues, financial constraints, domestic violence and other social/economic concerns
- ❖ Nutrition staff often lack the time, skills, and expertise to address participants social and economic concerns

# MASSACHUSETTS WIC FAMILY SUPPORT COORDINATORS

The Family Support Coordinators, in ten local WIC agencies, provide an unique and valuable service:

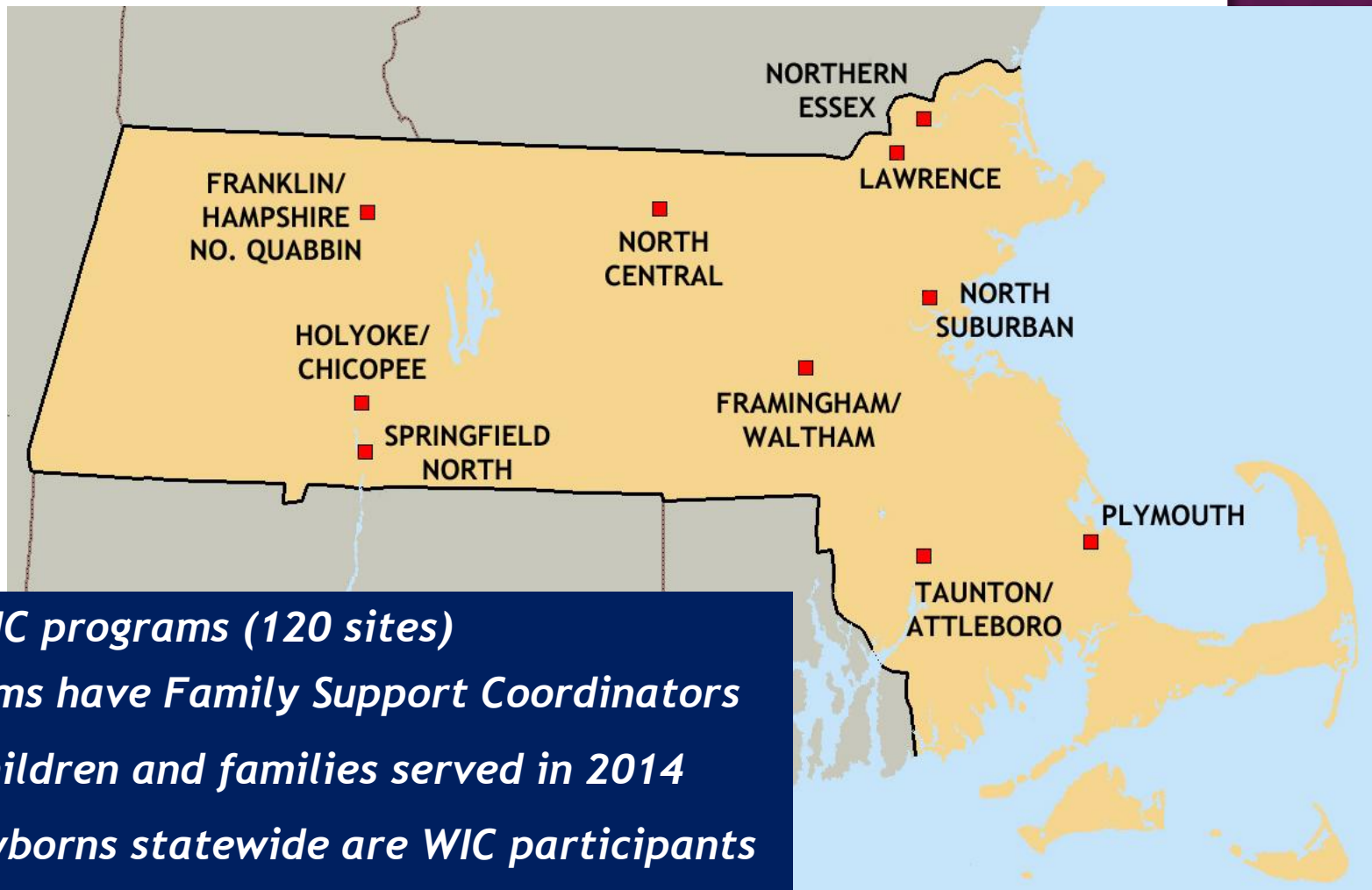
- ❖ Highly knowledgeable about the policies and procedures to enroll in health and human service programs and agencies
- ❖ Enhanced referrals and support to access and navigate difficult and intimidating health and human service agencies
- ❖ Collaborate with the WIC Community Coordinator, the outreach staff member, to obtain a current listing of the health and human service programs in the local WIC program service area



# MASSACHUSETTS WIC FAMILY SUPPORT COORDINATORS



# MASSACHUSETTS WIC PROGRAMS WITH FAMILY SUPPORT COORDINATORS



*35 local WIC programs (120 sites)*

*10 Programs have Family Support Coordinators*

*221,821 children and families served in 2014*

*46% of newborns statewide are WIC participants*

*4,498 referrals to FSCs from 2012 - 2014*



# MASSACHUSETTS WIC FAMILY SUPPORT COORDINATORS: CASE STUDY #1

## Homeless 23 year-old mother and 18 month old child:

- ❖ Unemployed, no medical insurance, frequent food insecurity, and no child care
- ❖ FSC referred her to SNAP, Early Head Start, and assisted with the application for Cash Assistance Benefits through Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA)
- ❖ Initially denied SNAP and Cash Assistance Benefits - FSC contacted agencies and denial of benefits reversed
- ❖ Applied for MassHealth (State Medicaid program) for health care and dental care
- ❖ Referred to Massachusetts HomeBase program for housing assistance

## Final outcome:

- ❖ Secured temporary housing
- ❖ Placed on a waiting list for permanent housing
- ❖ Enrolled in Early Head Start
- ❖ Covered by MassHealth insurance

# MASSACHUSETTS WIC FAMILY SUPPORT COORDINATORS: CASE STUDY #2

Family with 2 year-old child, mother terminally ill with pancreatic cancer:

- ❖ Family Support Coordinator facilitated referrals to mental health care providers, MassHealth, Visiting Nurse Association, SNAP and immigration services
- ❖ Family Support Coordinator helped the husband with funeral arrangements after his wife passed away
- ❖ Family Support Coordinator maintained close contact to make sure referrals were contacted and services received
- ❖ Family Support Coordinator met regularly with the husband prior to his scheduled nutrition education appointment

# REFERRALS FOCUS ON SPECIFIC AND VARIED NEEDS OF WIC PARTICIPANTS

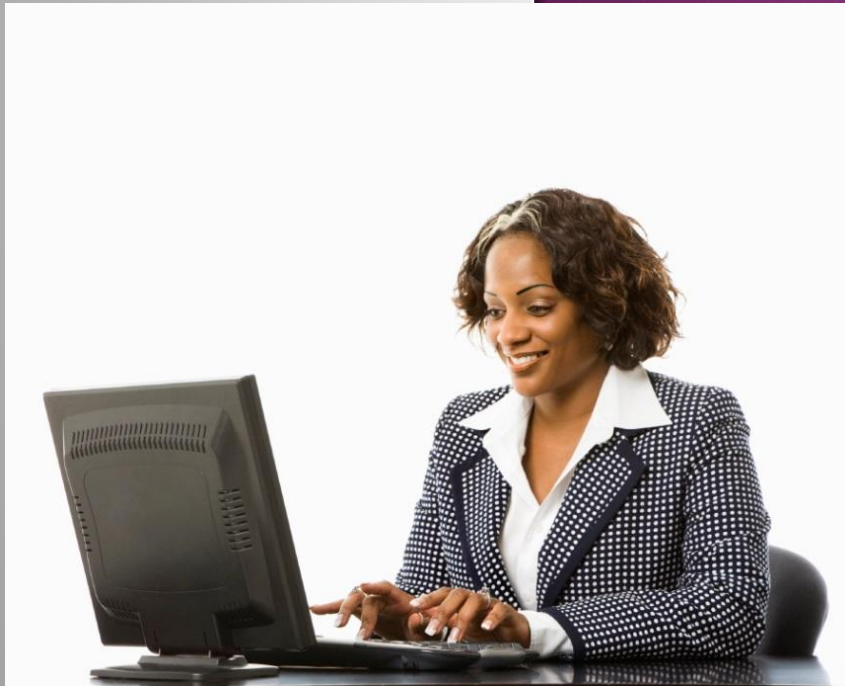
TOP REFERRALS FY 2012 - 2013	Participant Referred to FSC:	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Food Assistance	544	12.4%
SNAP (Food Stamps)	479	11.0%
Breast Feeding Peer Counselor	465	10.6%
Fuel Assistance	376	8.6%
Day Care	248	5.7%
Breast Feeding Support	220	5.0%
Dental Services	123	2.8%
Immunization	107	2.5%
MassHealth	72	1.7%
Head Start	66	1.5%
Housing	56	1.3%

Source: Massachusetts Eos

## Other programs, services, and referrals the Family Support Coordinators helped to facilitate from 2012 - 2014:

- ❖ Adult Education and ESL
- ❖ Birthing classes
- ❖ Cancer support groups
- ❖ Camp information
- ❖ Car seats
- ❖ Child support
- ❖ Christmas gift distribution programs
- ❖ Clothing (adults and children)
- ❖ College/continuing education
- ❖ Department of Children and Families
- ❖ Diapers
- ❖ Early Intervention
- ❖ Exterminator
- ❖ Family planning
- ❖ Foreclosure assistance
- ❖ Furniture, household items
- ❖ Grief counseling
- ❖ Health provider
- ❖ Homeless shelter
- ❖ Immigration services
- ❖ Jobs/employment services
- ❖ Legal services
- ❖ Mental health care (individual/family)
- ❖ Domestic violence services
- ❖ Military benefits
- ❖ Mortgage assistance
- ❖ Parenting programs
- ❖ Playgroups
- ❖ Section 8 (Housing)
- ❖ Services for twins
- ❖ Smoking cessation
- ❖ Social Security
- ❖ Support groups for fathers
- ❖ Support groups for grandparents
- ❖ Substance abuse
- ❖ Teen mom parenting groups
- ❖ Unemployment
- ❖ Utility assistance

# MASSACHUSETTS WIC EVALUATION COMPONENT





# EVALUATION OF MASSACHUSETTS WIC ENHANCED REFERRAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT PROJECT



## Evaluation Goals:

- ❖ What is the *impact* of Family Support Coordinators on the referral component of the WIC program?
- ❖ Does the Massachusetts WIC Enhanced Referral and Family Support Project *improve participant and staff satisfaction* with referral services?
- ❖ Does the Massachusetts WIC Enhanced Referral and Family Support Project, *enhance coordination* between WIC, community agencies, and other USDA nutrition programs?
- ❖ What impact does the Massachusetts WIC Enhanced Referral and Family Support Project have on *child retention* in WIC?





# MASSACHUSETTS WIC EVALUATION RESULTS

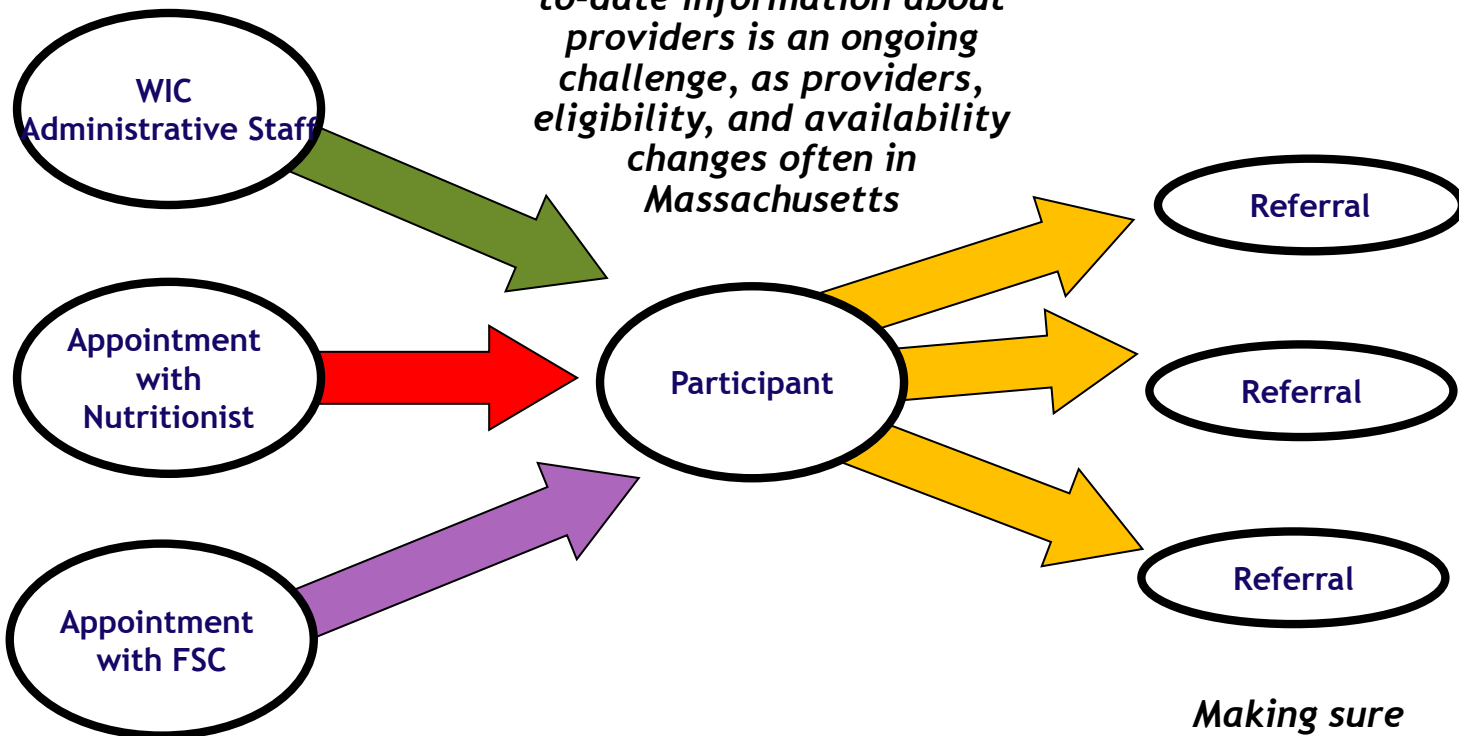


EVALUATION GOAL 1:

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF  
FAMILY SUPPORT  
COORDINATORS ON THE  
REFERRAL COMPONENT  
OF WIC?

# EVALUATION GOAL 1: IMPACT

*Finding the latest, most up-to-date information about providers is an ongoing challenge, as providers, eligibility, and availability changes often in Massachusetts*



*Any WIC staff can provide referrals.*

*Making sure participants follow-up on referrals is an ongoing challenge.*



# EVALUATION GOAL 1: IMPACT

The referral process is complex because all WIC staff (not just nutritionists) contribute, and because it is tailored to the specific needs of WIC participants:

- ❖ Staff vary in how comfortable they feel in making referrals, especially when dealing with participants with complex, extremely urgent, or unusual needs
- ❖ About 2% to 4% of WIC participants are “high need” with complex or unusual referral needs



## EVALUATION GOAL 2:

DOES THE MASSACHUSETTS  
WIC ENHANCED REFERRAL  
AND FAMILY SUPPORT  
PROJECT IMPROVE  
PARTICIPANT AND STAFF  
SATISFACTION WITH  
REFERRAL SERVICES?

# EVALUATION GOAL 2: SATISFACTION

## WIC staff and participants satisfaction with the referral process:

- ❖ **WIC staff and participants are highly satisfied with the referral process in Massachusetts**
- ❖ **The presence of Family Support Coordinators, in WIC programs, creates a synergy resulting in a distinct, positive effect on staff ability to meet participants' needs**

# EVALUATION GOAL 2: SATISFACTION

At WIC programs with Family Support Coordinators, STAFF are significantly:

- ❖ More likely to be proactive in observing participants and asking them about possible needs
- ❖ More aware of the complexity and range of participant needs (and thus are more specific in their recommendations)

# EVALUATION GOAL 2: SATISFACTION

At WIC programs with Family Support Coordinators, PARTICIPANTS are significantly:

- ❖ More likely to call nutrition staff for help outside their regular appointments (and rate staff more positively on responsiveness to their calls)
- ❖ More likely to report that staff follow up with them regarding needed services
- ❖ More likely to contact the programs or agencies recommended by nutrition staff or the Family Support Coordinator
- ❖ More likely to report that they did get the services they needed





**EVALUATION GOAL 3:**

**DOES THE MASSACHUSETTS  
WIC ENHANCED REFERRAL  
AND FAMILY SUPPORT  
PROJECT ENHANCE  
COORDINATION BETWEEN  
WIC, COMMUNITY AGENCIES,  
AND OTHER USDA  
NUTRITION PROGRAMS?**

# EVALUATION GOAL 3: ENHANCED COORDINATION

## The impact of the Family Support Coordinator on enhanced coordination:

- ❖ Participants are more likely to navigate and obtain the necessary services
- ❖ WIC participants lack knowledge of community resources and USDA nutrition programs, such as SNAP. They do not know what services are available, whether they might be eligible, or how to access specific resources
- ❖ Family Support Coordinators identify and provide assistance with accessing resources
- ❖ Family Support Coordinators provide a significant level of personalized, direct [follow-up](#) with participants

## EVALUATION GOAL 3: ENHANCED COORDINATION

*“They're definitely more personal here. They're more willing to help you than other programs. Because the other programs I feel like are so stretched out. Like they don't have the time for you, whereas here [at WIC] they definitely make the time if you need it.”*

*WIC Participant – Focus Group at WIC  
Program With FSC*



## EVALUATION GOAL 4:

WHAT IMPACT DOES THE  
MASSACHUSETTS WIC  
ENHANCED REFERRAL AND  
FAMILY SUPPORT PROJECT  
HAVE ON CHILD RETENTION  
IN WIC?

# EVALUATION GOAL 4: CHILD RETENTION

## Measuring child retention:

- ❖ Length of time between when a family is first certified as eligible for WIC and when the child terminates from the program
  - ❖ Analyzed 2011-2013 data from Massachusetts Eos representing 50,000 to 60,000 participants each year
- ❖ Gaps in WIC program participation
  - ❖ “Avoidable terminations” (Massachusetts term for missed recertification appointments or missed nutrition education appointments (2 months of benefits))

# EVALUATION GOAL 4: CHILD RETENTION

## Demographic difference for participants referred or not referred to the Family Support Coordinator:

- ❖ Few demographic differences between WIC participants referred to the Family Support Coordinators compared to WIC participants not referred to the Family Support Coordinator
- ❖ Both groups were similar in ethnicity, language, housing circumstances, risk factors, breastfeeding characteristics, pregnancy intentions and outcomes
- ❖ Family Support Coordinator provided the most services to pregnant women

## EVALUATION GOAL 4: CHILD RETENTION

Referrals to Family Support Coordinators are associated with a **small, positive impact** on child retention:

- ❖ Average of about 1 month (30 +/- days) added length of program participation if participant is referred to an FSC
- ❖ Reduction of about .5% to 1% “avoidable terminations” over the course of three years if a participant is referred to an FSC
- ❖ Numerically, in Massachusetts in 2014, about 250 WIC households would have benefitted from the services provided by the Family Support Coordinator (6,550 participants were terminated for non-categorical reasons at programs with FSCs)
- ❖ Massachusetts WIC Enhanced Referral and Family Support Project cost represents less than 1% of WIC’s total agency budget



# EVALUATION GOAL 4: CHILD RETENTION

**Participants referred and not referred to the Family Support Coordinators differ most significantly on factors not measured by Massachusetts' Management Information System (Eos) but from information obtained from the focus groups and participant surveys:**

- ❖ **Individuals' ability to negotiate difficult and complex life circumstances/manage stress**
- ❖ **Pre-existing knowledge of available community resources**
- ❖ **Self-advocacy (willingness to ask for help, ability to find and access resources appropriately and effectively, etc.)**
- ❖ **Trust - in their own abilities and in WIC staff**



# LESSONS LEARNED

## LESSONS LEARNED:

### Significant value in listening to staff and participants:

- ❖ In response to the emotional based nutrition education, *Value Enhanced Nutrition Education* and *Touching Hearts-Touching Minds*, Massachusetts WIC listened to staff's concerns about unaddressed issues participants were experiencing
- ❖ These initiatives created an opportunity for Massachusetts WIC to pilot a Family Support Coordinator, in ten programs, to provide comprehensive service coordination to facilitate and monitor referrals provided

## LESSONS LEARNED:

### Significant value in listening to staff and participants:

- ❖ By recognizing the complexity of participants' life circumstances and by addressing their non-nutrition needs, WIC staff are primarily able to focus on nutrition
- ❖ Evaluation has confirmed that while staff can recommend programs and services to participants, follow-up is also critical. Family Support Coordinators help determine if there are barriers to services, and help participants navigate those barriers effectively

# LESSONS LEARNED:

## Information system and evaluation:

- ❖ Eos was still in development when this evaluation began in late 2011, so incorporating information about Family Support Coordinators was challenging
- ❖ Generating high quality, consistent data is important not just for the evaluation, but also in terms of identifying staff training needs
- ❖ WIC staff were initially hesitant to change from historical use of paper surveys— the opportunity to utilize a new method for conducting on-line surveys has proven to be easier, time efficient, and cost-effective

# MASSACHUSETTS WIC CONTACT INFORMATION

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